

THE UNREST IN RELIGION

*An Enquiry by a member of the Church of England
into the present position of the Church*

by

ERASMIAN

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INTRODUCTION

THIS short treatise is an attempt by a lay member of the Church of England to submit for consideration certain questions which have long troubled his generation, and which today are stirring young minds to revolt. They are not hastily or irreverently asked, and it is already evident that some wise and thoughtful clerical leaders do not regard them as unfit for discussion.

The writer, who would rather remain anonymous, has obviously no authority and no special claims to knowledge. Any value which his treatise may have consists in the fact that it represents, as he believes, a good deal of ordinary and uninstructed opinion, which finds itself brought up by this arresting question: Can we feel sure that the venerable traditions affirmed daily in our churches are still literally accepted as living articles of faith—either by the congregations we belong to or by the ecclesiastical leaders to whose authority we look? And if we cannot answer this question ought we to rest contented with so ambiguous a result?

Two events of real significance seem to be calling for some re-consideration of doctrines which we are accustomed to revere.

The first, and incomparably the more important, is what we may term without exaggeration the New Learning of our age, the profound changes brought about in Biblical knowledge and ancient ecclesiastical assumptions by the immense advance in scholarship and study which has marked the last seventy, and more particularly the last fifty, years. In many respects this amounts to little less than a revolution in thought.

The second event is the remarkable Report on *Doctrine in the Church of England*, published in 1938, after years of careful consideration by a representative Commission appointed by the two Archbishops in 1922, and presided over during most of its labours by the present Primate.¹ Dr. Temple's Introduc-

¹ This volume is quoted hereafter as *The Doctrinal Report*.

tion, commending it to the public, is dated October 1937. Its conclusions can hardly fail to exercise great influence, when our minds are released from their present grim preoccupations, because they show the representatives of the Church discussing with singular openness and freedom to what extent our Articles and Creeds now command universal support.

The present writer should perhaps explain that he was brought up in a Victorian home in which piety was real and Church observances were natural and regular, though churches with a simple ritual were preferred. It was a household which valued liberality of opinion, and which held in high regard leaders like Frederick Temple and Arthur Stanley, without depreciating churchmen of a different stamp. Home associations of this type were followed by a Public School under a great Headmaster, whom many of his contemporaries would gladly have seen succeed to Stanley's place, a man of rare quality, heart and understanding, as widely tolerant as he was devotedly religious, a very human teacher as well as a scholarly divine. School-days passed under such a master were followed by four years in a great liberal College at Oxford, which may have strengthened a young man's endeavours to think out difficult problems for himself. But they did not prevent him from serving long afterwards as churchwarden in a country parish, under an Anglican Vicar of advanced opinions which his parishioners were not always persuaded to adopt. It is submitted that this experience, however imperfect in its training, should not disqualify the writer from entering on the enquiry which he wishes to pursue.

In a brief treatise of this kind, so largely based upon the work of others, it has been thought better to reduce references and footnotes to a minimum, though necessary references of course are given. The material available is very large. The literature of Biblical criticism and study, which is now so deeply influencing opinion, includes works by many eminent scholars in England and America, in Germany and France. Cambridge, the home of Westcott and Lightfoot, has contri-

buted to it of late years writers like Professor F. C. Burkitt and Professor Bethune-Baker. Oxford, where Professor Sanday so ably defended the conservative tradition, but found himself latterly greatly influenced by modern thought, has contributed theologians like Canon Streeter and Dean Rashdall. And both Universities may claim a share in producing the interesting and stimulating criticisms of Dr. Inge. But this is only to mention one or two names among many to whom the present writer is constantly indebted: more special acknowledgments he has rendered elsewhere. French contributions, sometimes disturbing in their candour, but remarkably logical and incisive, include well-known volumes by M. Loisy, Professor Guignebert and M. Jean Réville. German contributions, very numerous, may at times be startling in their theories, but are almost always careful and scientific in their treatment, and not rarely cautious and even conservative in their views. And American writers lack neither originality nor thoroughness in their search for truth. If a reference may be permitted to the bibliographies printed by several writers, and especially to that given by Dr. W. F. Howard in his study of the Fourth Gospel, it is easy to realize how wide and various the fields of information made available within the last two generations to students of the Gospel story are. To one or two old friends not mentioned by name in this volume still deeper acknowledgments on the writer's part are due.

CHAPTER I

THE CALL TO THE CHURCH

The Questions being asked

MANY voices in these days are asking, quietly but still insistently, whether all is well with our Established Church. Her fame stands as high as ever. Her leaders have not forgotten to remind us, even in this time of tribulation, of the part which religion has to play in rebuilding a ruined and distracted world, when the tortured nations can begin to breathe the air of freedom, to count on human intercourse and kindliness, again. They call especially upon the younger generation to find hope and inspiration for the future in the age-long traditions which the Church embodies, in her faith, her promises, her mysteries, her authority, in her confident, magnificent assurance, and above all in the lofty, tender teaching of the Master she adores.

To this call many will listen with great respect. Even to those who differ widely from her doctrines the Church of England makes an irresistible appeal. Her story is so full of splendour, of noble ardours, of unforgotten names. Her superb monuments are so familiar. To make a pilgrimage through England, from the shore on which Augustine landed, visiting the stately buildings dedicated to the faith he brought—Canterbury and Westminster, Winchester and Salisbury, Lincoln, York, Durham, and how many more?—is to glory in the greatest treasures we possess. And to recall the centuries of service for which these early outposts of religion stood, leavening a world of violent wrong-doing with pleas for righteousness, charity, compassion, keeping alive by precept and example, by labour and devotion, prayer and song, the thin flame of holiness in the hearts of men, is to acknowledge an immeasurable debt.

But the fact that we are heirs of a wonderful tradition and recognize its hold upon our minds carries us only to the threshold of the problem. It supplies no answers to the questions which are being asked. For a troubled generation seeking guidance it is not conclusive to be told that the Church of England offers authoritative creeds, founded on the earliest of Christian records and developed by teachers of high power and purpose in the mediæval world. The right of laymen to ask for explanations of these ancient creeds is not always admitted. Faith, we are reminded, needs no interpretation. To believe is to refuse to question; "doubt is sin." Yet young and independent spirits, trying as earnestly as all the generations before them to think out for themselves the perplexities involved, are not satisfied by indefinite assurances which leave their doubts without reply. They persist in asking their spiritual leaders for a clear, outspoken lead. Are the teachers themselves, some are tempted to wonder, completely satisfied with the leadership they offer or with the response which it evokes? What is the real history and meaning of certain difficult though familiar formulas repeated in our churches every week? How did they arise? What gives them their peculiar sanction? What to modern minds do they convey? How far can they bind the congregations which repeat them? How far do our Bishops and clergy now regard them as strictly binding on themselves? What in fact is the Church's message to the rising generation, and will she under present conditions help us to solve the troubles which lie ahead?

It is to questions of this nature that the present enquiry is addressed.

II

The alleged Neglect of Religion

It will be allowed that such questions are being asked and debated, and it will probably be admitted that they call for some reply. Seventy years ago Mr. Matthew Arnold, not only a poet, thinker, critic of rare quality but a close student of Scripture, and deeply convinced that Christianity, if relieved

of some encumbering dogmas, was the firmest foundation for human life, appealed to the theologians to "re-cast religion," and so to win once more the attention of the world. He found the clergy of his day lamenting the general neglect of religion, the little hold it had upon the people, the free questioning of its truth. Since then, and notably during the last half-century, great advances have been made in the study of the Bible, in the knowledge and scholarship, criticism and candour brought to bear upon the history of the Christian faith. All this remarkable volume of new learning, in England and America, France and Germany alike, is steadily becoming more available to students, and is compelling thoughtful men to examine more closely than ever the problems involved. If some of the criticism seems to us to be extravagant, and to carry rationalistic and sceptical arguments too far, the bulk of it is of undeniable soberness and value and cannot be lightly set aside. Yet in the sermons which we go to hear this topic is hardly ever mentioned. It seems to be ignored by—it can hardly be unknown to—the men most bound, one would think, to instruct us about it. The familiar formulas are constantly repeated. But few clergymen seem to ask their congregations to consider with them what in the light of the newknowledge the ancient phrases mean.

Meanwhile the indifference of the public grows. Today, as seventy years ago, we hear many complaints of the neglect of religion. Clerics and laymen, Bishops and Archbishops are united in deploring this. Men of note observe that comparatively few young people seem to be in whole-hearted sympathy with the Church. They draw the inference that "a generation which demands honesty of thought and belief will not be put off with the answer that the mysteries of religion require faith and not understanding." Army chaplains not long since reported that the doctrine of Christ's Divinity as often preached does not come home to men's minds, and that much that is told them about Him by the Church puzzles and fails to help them.

"It is awful to realize that, when one stands up to preach Christ, the soldier feels that you are defending a whole ruck of obsolete theories and antiquated muddles."

One eminent divine admits that "the Churches have but little influence, and if they had more they would not know what to do with it." Another, a Bishop, writing in August 1942, declares that "at least 80 per cent of the general population displays no interest in religion," and that "the vast majority of our people will not cross their thresholds to support Christian institutions in their immediate neighbourhood." A Headmaster with the same command of figures asserts that "75 per cent of the younger generation at the very least," seems to care nothing at all about religion. Yet neither Bishop nor Headmaster ascribes to teachers or ecclesiastical leaders any responsibility for this unhappy state of things. A volume of *Lay Views by Six Clergy* published in 1914 tells us that they find men and women "repelled by the dogmatic assertions so often presented as the remedies for doubt." Our Archbishops, it has been stated, "find on every side profound ignorance of the Christian Faith." These statements are positive and candid: they come in from every side. Even more insistently than seventy years ago people seeking for a rule of righteousness—for we are not an irreligious nation—are asking what is the reason and authority for the things which they have been taught to believe.

It is our boast that we have a comprehensive Church. The policy of her leaders at the Reformation, and generally of their successors since, was to include many different shades of thought, with the result that wide and deep "diversities of opinions," described in the old Royal Declaration as "both curious and unhappy differences," have always been found within her ranks. This spirit of comprehensiveness has, no doubt, added breadth and value to her teaching. But the desire to avoid accentuating differences or forcing disagreeable issues, and the effort to present to the world an undivided front, have too often meant unwillingness to speak of fundamental things. The diversities of opinions cannot really be disguised. And the difficulty of the situation has not lessened since the Tractarians raised their famous standard of revolt. No one can enquire today into the position of the Church of England without realizing how profoundly Tractarian traditions still influence its practices and its beliefs.

III

Tractarian traditions and Roman views

The noble gifts, the deep sincerity, the power and charm of the Oxford leaders, and the fine quality and lofty character of many of their Anglo-Catholic successors, have led people to forget how reactionary and obscurantist in some respects that celebrated Movement was. Newman justly called himself "very superstitious."

"I will not shrink"—the winning and melodious tones seem still to echo from the pulpit of St. Mary's—"I will not shrink from uttering my firm conviction that it would be a gain to this country, were it vastly more superstitious, more bigoted, more gloomy, more fierce in its religion, than at present it shows itself to be."

He had "fierce thoughts" at that time against all liberals; he dreaded revolution: he pronounced the French "an awful people"; he detected an element of anti-Christ in the great Reform Bill. And his dearest colleagues shared, even perhaps helped to teach him, these opinions. Keble's politics were those of a seventeenth-century Cavalier. Hurrell Froude was even more vehement. He idealized Becket, thought Cranmer only good for burning, "hated" the Reformers and the Reformation, held the lowest view of Milton, and declared that Whiggery had "by degrees taken up all the filth that has been secreted in the fermentation of human thought." The Tractarians not only devoted themselves, in Dr. Arnold's phrase, to "the idol of Tradition." From the first they made evident their deep distrust of "the shallow and detestable liberalism" of 1833: what would they have thought, one wonders, of the Christian Socialism associated with some of their theological successors? And when they went on to suggest that the Thirty-Nine Articles, in calling the sacrifices of Masses "blasphemous fables and dangerous deceits," did not speak against the Mass itself, and that all such binding formulas might be interpreted, if necessary, in a "non-natural" sense, they roused a protest which could not be withstood.

Under such influences diversities of opinions were certain to increase. While exhorting the clergy to magnify their office and to recognize dogma, primitive dogma, as the fundamental principle of religion, the Tractarians, often individually among the kindest of men, could find no place for toleration in the Established Church. A rigid line must be drawn between Churchmen and Dissenters. "A heresiarch," wrote Newman, "should meet with no mercy." Did not Cardinal Bellarmine in the sixteenth century explain that all heretics were slayers of souls, whom it was a kindness to remove from this life, and thus to save from yet deeper damnation? Has not Catholic authority all through the ages felt it a duty to proscribe and punish independence of opinion? Is there indeed, though it be mingled with countless acts of devoted and self-sacrificing service, a grimmer record of tyranny, obscurantism and oppression than is to be found in the venerable history of the Roman Church? These questions are not asked here from any desire to single out that great institution for criticism, but only to indicate to what rash lengths of reaction the Tractarians would have committed us a century ago, and to remind church-people of the consequences involved in any scheme for reuniting ourselves with that communion now. It is necessary to ask them only because men of weight and influence in the extreme wing of the Anglo-Catholic party are steadily urging on us the desirability of submitting ourselves once more to the authority, the dogmas and the infallibility of Rome.

Against traditions so ancient and unbending modern knowledge beats its wings in vain. The Vatican declaration of 1864 that the Pope "cannot reconcile himself with progress, liberalism and modern civilization" is as true today as it has been for generations. Yet the Church of England must do this or die. "What is intellect," asked Newman with the infinite simplicity which so strangely accompanied his delicate subtlety of mind, "what is intellect but a fruit of the Fall not found in paradise or heaven?" Yet a faith which disavows any intellectual foundation cannot for ever hold in subjection the intelligence of men. "The normal end of a policy which exploits the superstitions of the peasant," a trenchant critic reminds us, "is

a desperate warfare against education." For all the spell it cast upon the world, the Oxford Movement was not based on any open-minded or profound endeavour to examine the historical sources, or to explain the development and meaning, of the ancient dogmas which it accepted with such a rich exuberance of trust. And so far as the Church of England yields blindly to its teaching, so far will she fail to satisfy a generation which seeks a religion capable of interpreting its faith.

IV

Diversities of opinion in our Church

The old Tractarians have passed away, but their heirs, the new Tractarians, have become the dominating force in the Church of England now. Led by men of noble character and deep sincerity, advised and inspired by Edward Talbot of Keble, organized for fighting purposes by Charles Gore of Pusey House, they set themselves to modify and adapt the teaching of their predecessors. They realized that they could not fight against the spread of knowledge. They accepted, though with anxious caution, some of the new critical learning. They ceased to attack liberal views as shallow and detestable, and even stretched out their hands towards Socialist ideals. But they and their successors still share the old Tractarians' love of mediæval methods, their deep distrust of the changes which the Reformation introduced, their fixed belief in sacerdotalism and the authority of priests, their resolve to work, whatever the Thirty-Nine Articles may say upon the subject, for the re-establishment as far as possible of pre-Reformation practices and ideas.

Side by side with this powerful group our comprehensive Church contains a strong and articulate Evangelical party, which seems to be shaking off the limitations that have depressed it for too long. This party is still determined to maintain the Protestant traditions to which it believes the great majority of Englishmen to be stubbornly attached. And no pleas for unity and no policy of ecclesiastical discretion will

bring its members into line with their Anglo-Catholic colleagues.

Beside them again there is a rising Modernist party, increasing in its influence every day, because it has the courage to face the essential questions and to study still more closely the truths behind the dogmas, the actual words and thoughts of Jesus Christ. To these men, one is tempted to think, as Erasmus vainly thought in his day, the leaders of the Church must listen and the future must belong.

And, further, beyond these three distinctive parties our National Church, no doubt, contains many other shades of thought and many men of moderation, "lifted out of themselves by charity," who love rival forms of theology little and controversy not at all, and who would gladly turn their backs on differences which they will not exploit and cannot control. Is it desirable that these disunited parties should debate their differences within the Church and frankly re-examine their incompatible beliefs? Or is it more desirable—is it, in fact, these matters being vital, possible—that, in order to preserve an appearance of unity, they should decline to discuss them altogether?

To that question it is not easy to reply. Occupants of thrones in great Cathedral churches can seldom wear their mitres easily today. But few ecclesiastical statesmen would openly avow that the motto *quieta non movere*, the maxim of the shrewd old politician who established the supremacy of Parliament, and incidentally secured the Protestant Succession, is their governing principle as rulers. Reticence on their part may be the way of peace: but peace must satisfy or it will not be preserved. It is not very long since a Colonial Bishop denounced a brother Bishop as a pagan because he accepted certain critical opinions about the Pentateuch which no frank or thoughtful scholar now rejects!¹ Much more recently attempts were made to check the expression of Modernist opinions; but the Bishops on the Primate's advice declined in the end to take action in the

¹ Bishop Gray declared Bishop Colenso deposed in December 1863, and followed this up by excommunicating him. The Privy Council quashed these proceedings.

matter.¹ The present century has seen two very distinguished Bishops occupying at short intervals one great Midland See, both men of a character and quality to win the devotion of their followers, but holding and avowing theological opinions which it is difficult to regard as representing the same faith.² And these instances are only one or two examples of the wide disagreements on important points of doctrine which we know to exist among leading figures in the Church. They may be the penalty we pay for an Establishment in a country where men cannot be prevented from expressing their opinions, and they are infinitely better than the persecuting spirit which in certain countries is evidently as much alive today as ever. But it does not seem probable that, while the Establishment lasts, Parliament will consent to surrender, to either a divided or an undivided Bench of Bishops, the supreme control over Church government and doctrines which some ecclesiastical authorities desire.

To an observant generation invited to turn to the clergy for guidance this situation presents a serious problem. Questioners ask what are the reasons for these conflicts of opinion among men solemnly appointed and honestly anxious to show us the way to righteousness and salvation. What in fact now in the twentieth century are to be regarded as the trustworthy foundations of the faith which with such diverse interpretations they affirm? In these circumstances it may not perhaps be presumptuous for even an uninstructed layman to endeavour to summarize some results of the valuable studies placed at our disposal by modern theologians, often far better qualified to speak upon the subject than the theologians of seventeen or eighteen centuries ago. The best and indeed the only excuse for such an endeavour is an honest and fearless desire for historical truth.

¹ See Dr. Bethune-Baker's comments on these episodes (*The Faith of the Apostles' Creed*, xvii-xxvii).

² Dr. Gore became Bishop of Birmingham in 1905, Dr. Barnes in 1924.

V

Some problems raised by the Life of Jesus and by the
History of the Gospels and the Creeds

In the chapters which follow this enquiry is arranged under four heads:—

(1) *Our Knowledge of Jesus*

Is it not time for thoughtful men to ask themselves yet once again, and more insistently than ever, what was, so far as we can discover, the actual teaching of Jesus? What do we know with exactness even now of His brief personal history in the world? How far may we feel confident that the Gospels present to us the substance of His talk, His thoughts, His parables and sermons, so unmistakable in their individuality and so irresistible in their appeal?

(2) *The Story of the Gospels*

How did the four canonical Gospels come into existence, and what possibilities of error may they contain? What do we know of the origin of Mark's narrative, of Matthew's and Luke's indebtedness to him, and of the variations which they introduced? What importance ought we to attach to the discrepancies in the three Synoptic Gospels, and to the much greater discrepancies which the Fourth Gospel reveals?

What special difficulties and problems are involved in the wonderful and perplexing document which we call "the Gospel according to St. John"? How far is it historical and how far symbolical? How far was it affected by Gnostic theories, by the philosophies and heresies of contemporary thought? Can we interpret the doctrine of the Logos, and reconcile it with the views of the three other Evangelists? And can we wholly estimate the influence which this "Spiritual Gospel" exercised in the development of Christian Mysticism both at the time and in many generations which followed?

How far may textual errors and interpolations, contributions possibly from other writers, and apocryphal and legendary matter gathered in from Gospels never officially sanctioned by

the Church, have added to the uncertainties with which we have to deal? And how far did the vigour of St. Paul's writings, and the action of the Gnostic Marcion, Paul's vigorous admirer, contribute to the form which in the end the story of the Gospels took?

(3) *The Making of the Creeds*

To what extent is Supernaturalism now regarded as an essential element in true religion, and to what extent does modern thought allow that Biblical miracles may be explained away?

Is it not necessary for us in these days to re-examine closely the elements of the miraculous which Catholicism still associates with the mystery of the Mass? What is the real value of the evidence which purports to give us the details of the Last Supper and the words spoken by our Saviour there? Are the crucial passages, in the Gospels, the Acts, the First Epistle to the Corinthians, and, it may be added, in the *Didache* and in Justin Martyr, reliable or doubtful evidence on points of fact? Is it historically true that Jesus at His last meal with His disciples instituted a new ecclesiastical rite? What has since been the history of the Mass in the Catholic Church, and the struggle between the spiritual and the materialistic interpretations of the ceremony; and what is the doctrine of the Church of England on the subject since the sixteenth century and now?

Is the unalterable character of our dogmas a source of strength or of weakness to religion? Does the Church gain or lose adherents by maintaining our three ancient Creeds unchanged and unexplained? What is the importance to us to-day of the Councils and controversies which decided their shape, or of the obscure and perplexing language in which they were sometimes finally framed? If we take and frankly re-examine the doctrines of the Trinity, of the Virgin Birth of Jesus, of His Descent into Hell, and of His Resurrection, do we find our beliefs as churchmen fortified or shaken? Can the statements in the Creeds about the Virgin Birth and the Descent into Hell be accepted as binding? Is not even the

solemn story of the Resurrection and Ascension clouded with uncertainties very difficult to dispel?

Should we state the problem thus? How far do we desire to base our beliefs on facts which can be tested and proved to be historically true? And how far would we rather turn our backs on doubts, however insistent and difficult to answer, and accept without too close examination the traditions handed down to us for centuries on the authority of the Church?

(4) *The Inevitable Issue*

What is the paramount object of religion, to inculcate dogma or to inspire conduct? If the free discussion of dogma were permitted, would that not be a great step forward in dealing with the problems which we wish to solve? Does not the attitude of the Doctrinal Commission give good ground for hoping that encouragement towards this free discussion may now be given by leaders of the Church, who admit that grave intellectual difficulties have to be solved? And would not a concentration of thought on the vital problem of revising obsolescent dogmas rouse an interest in church-people which would soon destroy indifference, and relegate to their proper place—a secondary position—many questions of far less importance which occupy ecclesiastical activities to-day? To get back to the mind and words of Jesus, is that not the supreme object of us all? Is not the Imitation of our Master's life on earth of far more moment to us than the mysteries woven round His Incarnation, or the vast superstructure of Christology built up by His followers over His tomb? If discipleship with Him is what we seek, is the best guide to it to be found in clerical claims or unsatisfying traditions? Is there no finer or directer method by which mortality may draw near to the divine?

CHAPTER II

OUR KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS

I

What do we know accurately of His Story and His Birth?

IF we are puzzled by some ecclesiastical dogmas, and troubled by the deep divisions of opinion among responsible leaders of the Church, there is no better remedy than to go back to the beginning, and to ask ourselves once more what do we know with anything like certainty about the life and doctrines of the Founder of our faith. On answering that question too much labour cannot even now be spent; and the infinite pains devoted to it, especially during the last half-century, deserve the gratitude of all who love the search for truth.

But, admirable as many of these modern studies are in their breadth and honesty and learning, some of their conclusions may at first sight startle churchmen of conservative opinions. The writers are conspicuous for their determination to accept no statements on historical facts without reliable evidence to support them. Their fearless disregard of traditions which have no such evidence to rest on, will probably be thought by some too critical and sceptical in tone. In a few extreme cases their theories may be thought extravagant. But wide differences of method and of judgment are probably inevitable in a complicated study involving a great variety of opinions and overlaid by nearly twenty centuries of speculation. They should not be allowed to obscure outstanding problems which remain unsettled, nor lead us to turn away without examining the vital questions propounded to us still.

Serious students will admit that it is extremely difficult, for a historian who will accept no fact which is not fully proved, to recover clearly now the thoughts of Jesus or the main incidents of His sojourn in the world. It is not less difficult to decide how

far His teaching and His personality contributed to found the growing Church and the world-conquering religion built up by others after His death. It may be partly true that among the theologians "Jesus has been sacrificed to Christ."

"Ever since investigators, unbiassed by religious motives, first applied themselves to the study of the problems of Christianity, not one has failed to reach the fundamental conclusion that the traditional explanation, the orthodox account of Christian origins, will not bear critical examination."

We may not all concur in this opinion of M. Charles Guignebert, Professor of the History of Christianity in the Sorbonne. But no reader of his recent remarkable study of *Jesus* will question his thoroughness of treatment or his rigid loyalty to his high standard of historical research. It is well that the most candid and complete investigation should again be brought to bear on the story of the Master to whom, apart from ever-multiplying dogmas, the essence and inspiration of Christianity are due.

But how frail, in the light of these investigations, the foundations of our knowledge of Jesus appear!

The lack of references to Him in secular records seems to us nowadays almost incredibly strange. Beyond a phrase or two in Tacitus, Suetonius and the younger Pliny, and in the writings of Justin and of Celsus, a contemptuous Roman critic of the second century, there is practically no mention of Jesus in the whole great literature of Rome. And among Jewish writers the silence or indifference on the subject is profound. The Talmud paid Him no respect, and orthodoxy retorted by proscribing the "damnable book" for a thousand years!¹ Justus of Tiberias, a Galilean born, it may be, in His lifetime, left two historical works, but made no reference in them to Christ. Philo of Alexandria, who lived through His lifetime, produced, we are told, a great many works and took a strong interest in the history of Israel; but he has not a single allusion to Jesus. Josephus, in the same first century, has a well-known reference to Him as "a wise man, if indeed one may call him a man," who taught and wrought wonderful works, was cruci-

¹ See the brilliant article on the Talmud in the *Quarterly Review* for October 1867.

fied by Pilate and rose from the dead. But competent critics think that this passage has been revised by a Christian hand. For more authentic references to Him, and for written records of His words and acts, we have to wait till the Gospel histories begin to take shape. Those histories also have their puzzling problems. But the growth and formation of the Gospel Canon will be examined later on.

For the moment it may be best to state briefly the little that we know with some degree of accuracy about our Saviour's early life. We cannot say positively when or where He was born, though the stories gathered round His childhood are among the dearest and most familiar of our own. The date of His birth is doubtful: it may have been three or four years before our era begins. The best opinion on the whole seems to be that He was born under Herod, who died in the year 4 B.C., and that He was crucified in A.D. 29 or 30. The day of His birth was not, it seems, the 25th of December, Christmas Day; that day was dedicated to the birth of Mithra, the central figure of the Roman soldiers' favourite creed. Mithra was a sun-God. In the Roman calendar December 25th was the day of the winter solstice, and was claimed for Mithra as the "birthday of the unconquered sun."¹ The Fathers of the second century regarded Mithraism as the most formidable rival that Christianity had to face. Various other days have been suggested—in January, March, April and May. December 25th was fixed at Rome generations later after a long period of uncertainty and doubt.

The place of our Lord's birth also is disputed. Was it Bethlehem, as so often stated, or Nazareth, where Joseph and Mary lived, or Capernaum, with which so many traditions connect Him? The Gospel story is not clear. Matthew puts the birth at Bethlehem, the City of David, and gives us a pedigree of some forty generations showing His descent from Abraham through David and Joseph. Old prophecy declared that Bethlehem would give a Governor to Israel; and wise men from the East, coming to enquire, startled Herod by telling him that a star

¹ See Clodd (*Jesus of Nazareth*, 201) and Dill (*Roman Society from Nero to Marcus Aurelius*, 585).

had led them to Bethlehem, to the place where the young child was. But Joseph was warned by an angel to flee into Egypt, and recalled later by another angel to dwell in Nazareth after Herod's death. Luke's account is rather different. He too gives us a pedigree, but it is much longer, over seventy generations, leading up from Joseph through David and Abraham to Adam, "which was the son of God." Its list of names differs widely from Matthew's, and neither pedigree is of much historical value. Luke suggests that Joseph, being of the house of David, went up from Nazareth to Bethlehem, David's city, to comply with the Emperor's edict that all the world should be taxed. But there are difficulties, of chronology especially, in regard to this edict of taxation. And doubt arises whether these venerable traditions, for all the charm and beauty woven round them, may not owe more to legends bred of fancy and devotion than to any record of established facts. If that were so, both Matthew's grim story of the flight into Egypt and the massacre of innocents which followed, and Luke's tender and appealing idyll of the wondrous Babe found lying in the manger by country shepherds sent to seek Him by the angel of the Lord, would have to be relegated to the borderland where history loses itself in myth.

The truth is that the four biographies of Jesus officially sanctioned by the Church do not agree about the birthplace. Matthew and Luke set the scene at Bethlehem, but their accounts of it vary from each other. Mark's Gospel, the earliest in date and so largely the basis of those which followed, gives no support to the stories about Bethlehem; and John's Gospel, the latest of the four, ignores them altogether. Can we regard these contradictory statements as satisfactory evidence for a historical fact?

II

Uncertainties in the history of His Ministry. The elements of Miracle

Again, the history of the ministry of Jesus is in some respects curiously obscure. We do not know with any certainty when it began or how long it went on. It seems strange that the latter

point especially should have been so soon forgotten. The best opinion, apparently, is that its duration was limited to some months, in all perhaps about a year. It has been calculated that it would have taken the speaker hardly more than an hour to utter all the sayings of Jesus that we actually possess, and hardly more than six hours to deliver all the discourses which the Gospels attribute to Him.¹ The author of the Fourth Gospel alone suggests that the ministry may have lasted for three years or more. But the author of that wonderful document, with the philosophy of a mystic and perhaps the vision of a seer, was by common admission loftily indifferent to many matters of chronology and fact. None of the Evangelists take much interest or offer us certainties in the matter of dates. And those who built up the story of Jesus after the Resurrection, preoccupied in adding mystery and grandeur to the newly born religion, seem to have cared strangely little to recover verifiable details of their Master's life on earth.

Summaries have been attempted, reducing to the barest minimum all that we know for certain of those brief mortal yet immortal years. But there is no reason to reject the outlines of the Gospel story, beginning with the humble life in Joseph's house at Nazareth, among a family of brothers and sisters slow to recognize His powers. Of His mother we hear singularly little. We do not know what became of her after her son's death. The wealth of legends which gathered about her is a part of the hagiography of later days. Of the boy's childhood also outside the apocryphal stories we are told little. He was educated, no doubt, like other Jewish boys in circumstances such as His, learned something—much more than most boys, one imagines—of the Jewish Scriptures and traditions, of the tales of the prophets and of Messianic beliefs. His talk was Aramaic; it is not likely that He knew Greek. The boy may have gone up at times with His parents to attend the great festivals in the Holy City. The story that during one of these

¹ Professor F. C. Burkitt, no inconsiderable authority, writing in 1920, was of opinion that the ministry of Jesus extended to about four hundred days, and that the incidents told in the Gospel stories might have occupied some forty separate days, leaving nine-tenths of His public life a blank

visits the child of twelve appeared among the Doctors of the Temple, which only Luke among the Evangelists relates, has beyond that no known historical foundation. The welcome given to Him by John the Baptist even relentless critics allow us to accept, though we may not be certain about all the details. That welcome may well have been the impulse which started Jesus on His mission, and drove Him perhaps into the desert to meditate in solitude awhile. But the story of His temptation by the Devil there, a story so like those told of other founders of religions, and a part of the long-persisting legends of the struggle between the powers of goodness and the powers of evil throned in Hell, may probably be left without injustice to the world of wonder to which it belongs.

To Jesus, as to St. Paul and to most of their contemporaries, the life of man was encompassed by mystery. God was the Father of mankind. Satan was His Enemy, always hovering over the world. Angels and demons, ministers of supernatural and unseen powers, were ever on the watch to intervene, to succour and save humanity, or, it might be, to tempt and to betray it. When Jesus began to preach and to heal, to choose disciples and to gather followers round Him, listeners were quick to recognize the winning charm and simplicity of His teaching. Tales of the cures and miracles He wrought spread widely. It was an age of miracles readily accepted and believed. Can we be surprised at that when we remember that even into the twentieth century the Roman Catholic Church has always regarded them as the natural accompaniment of the lives of saints? The English Church, less dependent on credulity, has been less hasty in accepting reports of them as facts: and English divines of authority and learning are not to-day prepared to admit that all the abnormal occurrences related in the Gospels are literally and historically true. Some of the wonders described, wonders of healing in particular, may be capable of natural explanations; others may not. But our religion does not consist in believing that Jesus could walk upon the water, or restore the dead to life, or blast a fig-tree with a word, or feed a multitude with a few loaves and fishes. Christianity will not stand or fall by the verification, now

impossible, of narratives such as these.¹ What importance Jesus Himself attached to miracles it may be difficult to say. He may have sometimes tried to check an excessive reliance on them, if His words in the Fourth Gospel are accurately reported: "Except ye see signs and wonders ye will not believe."

III

The new Prophet's message and Messianic claims. The solemn Tragedy. Conflicting rumours and perplexing personal details

We may say with confidence that the message of the new prophet when His preaching began was in substance much the same as John the Baptist's: "Repent ye, for the Kingdom of God is at hand." God would set up His Kingdom soon—the time was imminent—a kingdom essentially of love and righteousness, where men of changed hearts and spiritual self-surrender might hope to enter in. We cannot say with equal confidence that Jesus regarded Himself as the Messiah. It has been asserted that "there is not a single synoptic passage which proves that Jesus called Himself the Messiah or allowed people to call Him by that title." He spoke of Himself most often as the Son of Man, an expression found in Ezekiel and in Daniel, the significance of which is doubtful. It is not necessarily an allusion to the Messiah; and the term Messiah, applied to kings and priests on whom the holy oil was poured, meant simply the "anointed." It did not in Jewish literature signify the Son of God. It has also been disputed whether Jesus claimed or used the title Son of God.² The Greek phrase *παῖς τοῦ Θεοῦ*, some critics have suggested, might mean only the child or servant of God. Be that as it may, the exact meaning of these phrases is not a point of which most people can feel dogmatically sure.

¹ See *The Faith of the Apostles' Creed* by Dr. J. F. Bethune-Baker (xiii-xiv). This question is discussed further in chapter iv. Opinions expressed by men like Dr Inge, Professor Burkitt and Dr Bethune-Baker cannot be lightly dismissed.

² But the definite statements in Matthew xxvi. 63-64, Mark xiv. 61-62, and Luke xxii. 70, must be borne in mind.

The belief in the prophet of Nazareth's powers, and the desire to share in the kingdom He proclaimed, grew stronger daily as His brief ministry went on. But we cannot be certain that it reached or stirred very considerable masses of people. The movement begun in Galilee was, however, strong enough to rouse among the Jewish authorities feelings of opposition and alarm, and the resolve of Jesus to go up to Jerusalem for the Passover challenged His opponents and inevitably brought matters to a head. Of the moving and dramatic tragedy which followed we know enough to feel sure of the main story—the forebodings of danger, the last hours with His disciples, the arrest and trial, the cruel and infamous death, and then the marvellous tale of Resurrection, of reappearance, of the passing into Heaven. In the days which followed memory and devotion, history and legend were all alike concentrated on preserving sacred traditions such as these. But even so the accounts of the Passion in the Gospels differ strikingly and widely: it is impossible to be certain how far we can depend on all the facts they give. The cry of despair from the Cross, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?"—a cry so infinitely natural and human—is deeply stamped upon our minds. Historically it may be open to some doubt, and so in the whole solemn story may be the authenticity of other painful and memorable details. But we can hardly doubt that the feeling of despair was there, and that for the moment it crushed His shocked and stricken disciples. The reaction from their fear and grief, when they heard that the mortal leader whose agony they had witnessed had risen from the dead, to prove His immortality, to comfort their afflictions, to share with them the glorious kingdom which He had foretold, might well make strong and sorrowing men see visions and fill them with ecstasy and inextinguishable hopes.

One other point in this brief outline of a figure so near our hearts and yet so dimly known to us may be worth mention. Our records of the life of Jesus tell us nothing about His appearance. The grave and noble beauty of the face which shines down on us from many a canvas of old painters, and which the picture-books of our childhood have from time

immemorial reproduced, holds and will probably always hold the field. But it has historically no foundation beyond the fancy and the genius of the painters. If we are to believe reports sanctioned and repeated by Fathers of the Church, it seems that statements circulating among Christians in the early days spoke of their Master's appearance in strangely depreciatory terms. Small, ill-favoured, mean, insignificant, and even slave-like, are phrases used by men like Origen, Cyprian and Tertullian. Cyril of Alexandria is credited with describing Him as "the ugliest of the children of men."¹ One wonders how such assertions could have been permitted to take root, and still more how they could have been repeated by Christian leaders, who must surely have been aware that they had little authority for them. It is not credible that they should have been true of a Master who had won not favour only but a deep and loving personal allegiance wherever He moved among the children of men. Could such rumours have been partly due to the desire of which among some devout Christians there are other indications, the desire to emphasize and over-emphasize the difference between the suffering mortality of Jesus and the splendour of the triumphant and glorified Christ? One is again reminded on how little historical evidence some of these primitive traditions rest.

IV

Our record of the Sayings of Jesus. The simple teaching overlaid by Christology since

The outline of the life of Jesus, then, so far as we can reproduce it, must be allowed to be tremulous and misty. It is rather in His sayings, those unique and unexpected sayings, and in the discourses which sank so quickly into His hearers' hearts, that the true history of His mission and character is found. There, and not in the theologies which later on obscured the picture, is the real Jesus whose teaching we may try to

¹ See Guignebert's *Jesus* (in Professor S. H. Hooke's English translation, 164-9). The epithets are taken from that, and my references to Professor Guignebert's book are to this translation

reconstruct. Yet that teaching, as we have it, is at best a fragment. The quantity of it all told is very small, and we may be sure that, as reproduced in the Gospels, it has undergone a good deal of editing and re-arrangement. The sayings originally spoken in Aramaic may well have suffered something in translation, and something also in oral transmission before they were written down. Jesus, so far as we know, wrote nothing, and the only words He is said to have taught His disciples are the words of the Lord's Prayer. There was no such thing as regular reporting. Collections of His sayings would naturally be made in the early Christian Churches and arranged perhaps for instruction there. The parables probably circulated in the same way, in pairs it has been suggested. The oral traditions would presently be written down, copied and recopied, with many possibilities of alteration and error. All these little points have to be remembered, and they prevent us from asserting that any special words attributed to Jesus are beyond question historically true.

Then again, we are reminded, the Evangelists were not content to be merely chroniclers or reporters. Matthew gives us a dignified and lucid picture. His object was to paint a picture of Jesus of Nazareth as He walked on earth, fulfilling the ancient words of prophecy and announcing a new kingdom to penitents and believers. Luke was a great literary artist who did not disclaim to embroider his materials. Both Evangelists felt at liberty to use the matter at their disposal freely, to adapt, arrange and add to it, or make omissions from it, as they thought best. The discourses of Jesus as they give them, including the immortal Sermon on the Mount, are thus to some extent artificial compositions. But they may well embody, and most of us feel confident that they do embody, authentic sayings of the speaker. The actual words which have reached us may be unauthenticated, fragmentary, imperfect. But we are not unreasonable in believing that the substance and the spirit of His teaching shine imbedded like jewels there.

Jesus found His followers first among humble and comparatively unlearned men. Humility was a quality he never ceased to praise. His talks with them were naturally simple, homely

and spontaneous, and His message to them was measured largely by their understanding. He was, for the most part, content to repeat with deep earnestness a few plain ideas, to illustrate them by parables often of a deeper meaning, to illumine them with flashes of wisdom and perception from a mind and an imagination far loftier than theirs. But the talks were essentially occasional. The note of simplicity was rarely lost. A thoughtful modern Jewish writer has paid tribute to this aspect of our Lord's teaching in a passage which may be worth quoting here.

"We seem to see a man aflame with love of God and love of man, who passed his short life, and encountered his awful death, in their true and unflagging service. We seem to see a man of singular purity of soul, and of absolute sincerity of purpose. A large-hearted man, who gazed into the deepest nature of righteousness, and realized the very essence of true religion. A man who loved and was beloved, who looked below the surface, and could recognize the germs of goodness beneath neglect and ignorance and sin. A hater of shams and hypocrisy and formalism and conceit, yet, withal, a man conscious of his own power, his own inspiration, his own message and mission from God. A man of great tenderness, of deep compassion, he cared deeply for the waifs and strays, the flotsam and jetsam of humanity, who were often more sinned against than sinning. Yet a strong man too, and a fearless, who could denounce those from whom he differed, those who opposed his teaching, and those in whom he saw, or thought he saw, the sins he specially hated—self-righteousness, hypocrisy, formalism—with the utmost force, and with, perhaps, exaggerated violence. A lover of children, and a lover of nature, simple, serene and single-eyed; no ascetic, no solitary, but independent of material needs, detached, because his higher duty, as he believed, demanded it, from all human ties of family or state. He lived for his fellow-Jews and died for them: he lived in obedience to his mission, and in intimate communion with God."¹

There is no proof that this insistent herald of a new kingdom which was to come quickly, and of the sorrows and tribulations

¹ See *Liberal Judaism and Hellenism* (126-7) by C. G. Montefiore.

to be endured before it came, looked for the moment far beyond that or dreamed of any worldly triumphs far ahead. "This generation shall not pass till all these things be fulfilled." There is no reliable evidence that Jesus ever attempted to organize a new institution, much less a Church which should endure for centuries and dominate the world.¹ How did it happen that teaching so free from artifice or formalism came later to be made the plaything of polemical theology, and overlaid with doctrines so mysterious and perplexing as largely to obliterate the memory of the source from which they sprang? That is the all-important question which leaders of the Church are being asked to answer by a new and bewildered generation, as they have been asked so often before.

v.

The Age of the Apostles and the profound influence of St. Paul. The *Didache*. The dying Pagan Creeds. Stoicism and Mithraism. The background against which Christianity grew up

The half-century which followed the death of Jesus is the germinating time of the seed which He had sown. The Gospel biographies, written in Greek but based on Aramaic collections, did not take shape for forty, fifty, sixty years or more after His death. The little communities of Christians grew. They treasured and handed on their memories and materials. But the trials and afflictions foretold by their Master broke into their communings and brought danger to their doors. While Jerusalem fell before the Roman legions² and war destroyed the Jewish State, the thoughts of Christians were concentrated more and more upon the mystery of the Resurrection, and on the expectation of the new kingdom which might soon dawn to save and end the world. The personal history and teaching of Jesus fell more and more into the

¹ It is difficult to feel sure about the authenticity and meaning of Matthew xvi.
18. See Guignebert's *Jesus* (320 sq.) and Dr. B. H. Streeter's *Four Gospels* (258).

² In A.D. 70.

background, as the recollection of Him grew dimmer and as those who had seen and known Him passed away.

At the same time those years of hope and fear and expectation were also years of active instruction and missionary effort. The scattered groups of Christians drew together for prayer and worship, sharing in their memories and traditions, sharing too in simple meals—"breaking bread from house to house"—which served to remind them of the Last Supper of the Apostles with their Lord. Of the Apostles themselves with a few exceptions we hear very little. "What became of the Twelve Apostles," says Dr Streeter, "is one of the mysteries of history." Peter and James the brother of Jesus became for a time the centre of the Christians at Jerusalem. James was probably murdered in 62 A.D. by a Jewish mob, and John may possibly have shared his fate. But Peter and John while living were naturally among the leaders of the Christians both in Jerusalem and elsewhere. New preachers also, Stephen, Paul, Barnabas and others, quickly rose to fame. In the first two chapters of the Acts, that rather inadequate and disappointing chronicle, we are told of Peter announcing to a gathering of disciples the ruin and death of Judas, and using the strangely chosen words "his bishoprick let another take" about the election of Matthias in his place. And we are told also of the memorable scene on the day of Pentecost, when Peter again took the lead, and appealed to all those present to be baptized in the name of Jesus and to proclaim Him as "both Lord and Christ."

But among the men who shaped the new ideas and began to found, as Jesus never tried to found, a great ecclesiastical system, no one exercised a more powerful influence than St. Paul. In the days of struggle and confusion before the new religion had taken root, while traditions were still in the making and no written biographies of Jesus had appeared, Paul's preaching, testimonies, letters became of supreme importance in establishing beliefs. His Epistles are the earliest Christian literature we have. It is probably no exaggeration to say that without them the Christian Church would never have been built. God, he told the Athenians—the words are worth

remembering to-day—"hath made of one blood all nations of men." His sudden call, that startling vision on the Damascus road, found in him something more than a convert. He sprang to life at once as the prophet of a new crusade, the most rapt and fervent of believers. With his burning earnestness, his moving eloquence, his intense conviction of a mission confided to him personally by Christ, he soon became the greatest missionary that ever lived. He was not perhaps always easy to work with. He may have been rather self-engrossed and domineering. He has been called ambitious, cunning, superstitious, a Pharisee from top to toe, pictured—if we can depend at all on a second-century description—as an ugly little Jew, short, bald, beetle-browed and hook-nosed, full of energy and nervous strength. But, say what his detractors may, Paul had beyond all question noble and commanding gifts—a strong and independent mind open to new ideas,¹ a warm heart, fearless courage and devotion, the sensitive imagination of a visionary and mystic, the practical capacity of a born leader of men. At a moment when Christianity had as yet no written defence of itself to offer, and no powerful voice to proclaim its message to the world, Paul came forward, sweeping aside all narrow ceremonial and conventional barriers, and spoke to the hearts of his hearers with a fire and force no listener could resist. His words, though sometimes hard to understand—was the thought behind that splendid rhetoric always perfectly lucid?—had a note of inspiration in them. At their best they rank among the loftiest utterances of mankind.

There was printed first in 1883 an ancient document, discovered in 1875, *The Teaching of the Lord by the Twelve Apostles to the Gentiles*, describing the life of the primitive Church as the first century drew to an end.² For the struggling communities of Christians they were difficult and critical years, and some differences inevitably arose among the members.

¹ But Dr. H. A. A. Kennedy (*St. Paul and the Mystery Religions*, 211 sq.) declines to allow that Oriental cults and traditions had anything like the influence upon Paul's theological ideas which M. Loisy would attribute to them.

² It is difficult to date exactly and may not be all of one date. There are translations of the *Didache* by Bishop Lightfoot, Bishop Wordsworth, Dr. Rendel Harris, Dr. Kirsopp Lake and others.

There were differences on points of administration, differences over rules and ritual—should circumcized and uncircumcized converts eat together, should Jews and Gentiles stand on the same footing? And there were other differences more personal than these. Meanwhile the organization of the Church was growing, though in many places it must have remained primitive and fluid for a considerable time. We hear of officers being appointed, of apostles and prophets, of presbyters and deacons, and of overseers or bishops also, though these have no pretensions yet to any divinely delegated powers. And there are indications of disorder and confusion among these early leaders of the Churches both in matters of conduct and in matters of belief.¹

The *Didache* is a brief manual of the Christian life. The Christian there is taught to love God and his neighbour, to live uprightly and to abstain from idols. Christian worship includes Baptism, Fasting, Prayer and the Eucharist. The Lord's Prayer is to be repeated thrice daily. The breaking of bread in fraternal communion recalls and symbolizes the Last Supper, but no special miracle yet attaches to it, still less any reminiscence of Pagan sacrifice or Pagan rites. The references to church organization show that the apostles are discriminated from the prophets, but that the bishop is hardly distinguished from the presbyter yet. Episcopacy is not universal, and resident ministers have not altogether displaced the itinerant preachers or prophets. There is also in the *Didache* a chapter on the Second Coming of the Lord. That was still eagerly expected. But, as Professor Burkitt has pointed out, biographical interest in the life of Jesus seems to be completely wanting. "For aught that appears in the *Didache* Jesus of Nazareth might never have been crucified." Were worshippers unconsciously beginning to forget the human story of Jesus in order to dwell the more insistently upon His glory as the Son of God?

The age of the Apostles quickly passed. Variations of practice and tradition grew up as the Christian congregations increased in number. Prominent centres developed on their

¹ See the apocryphal *Vision of Isaiah*, and 2 Timothy ii, and 2 Peter ii

own lines. Jewish Christianity withered, but Paul preached the new faith steadily in Asia and carried his triumphant doctrines across the seas to Greece and Rome. Within some thirty-six years of the Crucifixion Peter and Paul, tradition avers, died in the Imperial city, and in their deaths founded a dominion with which no Empire of the Caesars could compare. Belief in the Roman gods had crumbled, and few of the deified Emperors who replaced them inspired enthusiasm as representatives of the divine. The Pagan religions were inclined to be tolerant to others, though the attitude of the Roman authorities towards the still obscure and humble Christian congregations displayed a certain impatience and contempt. Open-minded indifference towards the ancient deities both stimulated superstition and tended to develop philosophical thought. Stoicism lived on, and in its nobler aspects both won and deserved admiration. By the best of the Stoics the essence of deity was found in the love of mankind. "For man to help man is God," was a striking phrase attributed to Poseidonius. And the same search for goodness, though pursued by different methods, the desire perhaps to find in man some spark of the divine, may be traced in other current philosophies and among the liberal thinkers whom Seneca and Plutarch represent.

The truth is that the undying instinct for religion, inspired afresh by Greek philosophy, was turning men's thoughts more and more towards the quest for spiritual things. Ancient faiths, mystery-cults imported from the East and purged of their grosser associations, sun-worship and nature-worship with all the legends they gave rise to, were finding many followers among the innumerable races ruled by Rome. Mithraism especially was growing in strength, and had some remarkable points of resemblance with Christianity. It spoke of a deity who mediated between God and men and saved mankind by his death and self-sacrifice. Its object was to do battle against evil—a soldiers' battle for a soldiers' creed. Its ceremonies seemed to Tertullian and others to parody the practices of the Christian Church. And Mithraism was only one of many superstitions waiting to step into the holy places vacated by the

dying Gods, which Christianity was destined to conquer and retain. For men still lived in a supernatural world, haunted by demons and evil spirits and imposed on constantly by charlatans and rogues, a world of false prophets, of priestcraft and witchcraft, of dabblers in astrology and magic, of miracles readily invented and as readily believed. It was also, to a large extent, a world of barbarous and cruel rites, of worship deeply tinged with sensuality, of emotional raptures leading easily to vice. There are on record astonishing examples of imposture long and successfully maintained. A self-styled prophet who secured a hearing could generally depend on finding a following of dupes. Credulity was deep-seated, wide-spread, actively alive. The finer spirits, lifted above the confusion by their hopes and dreams, stand out in high relief against this background. But the background of ignorance and self-delusion was always there. It should not be forgotten that this background overshadowed the age in which the Christian Church grew up.

CHAPTER III

THE STORY OF THE GOSPELS

I

Early manuscripts of the New Testament. The difficulties and uncertainties which they present

THE story of the writing of the Gospels in the dark years after the Crucifixion is of deep and abiding interest. But it offers many difficult problems because our knowledge of those years is so limited and confused. In examining these uncertainties, particularly during the last half-century, a wealth of patient, thoughtful learning has been spent. The old idea that the New Testament was, like the Old Testament, verbally inspired, has perforce been abandoned. We cannot deny that these ancient documents, even the four Gospels officially sanctioned by the Church, are full of errors and conflicting statements. We know that they were subjected for many years to all sorts of alterations—improved, corrected, adapted, added to, abridged—as those who revised them thought best, or as contemporary controversies suggested and the dominant ecclesiastical authorities of the day desired. And we know that, apart from deliberate changes, the manuscripts copied and re-copied so often, both before and after the adoption of the official Canon, must have repeated and circulated many mistakes in an ever-widening circle as the generations passed. There were no spectacles to help copyists sixteen or eighteen centuries ago.

The manuscripts of the New Testament are very numerous. They have been long and reverently treasured and preserved. They go back to a dim antiquity. The oldest known to us, apart from a few papyrus fragments, may date from the early part of the fourth century, Constantine's day. But even in their case there is a gap of well over two hundred years between the dates when they were written and the dates when the Gospels

were composed. Those were largely years of difficulty and trouble, years in which many Christians were busily at work gathering together any recollections or traditions which bore upon their wonderful new faith, developing the history, the dogmas and the organization of the Church. How far in those years would the actual words of the Master be retold unaltered, or the incidents of His life be exactly recalled? It is hard to say. When it is remembered that there are over fourteen hundred Greek manuscripts of the New Testament, about forty of which are more than a thousand years old, over thirteen hundred lectionaries which contain the greater part of the Gospels arranged as lessons for the year, and innumerable quotations by early Fathers which are in effect fragments of other manuscripts now lost, it will be understood what infinite opportunities existed for errors to creep in. Between two famous manuscripts, the eighth century E, now called the Byzantine text, and the fourth century B, called Vaticanus, some four thousand differences have been noted in the Gospels alone. Most of these differences are trivial, but the number of them is remarkable, and their effect when words are important may be great. In the second, third and fourth centuries there were many marked divergences between the current texts.

II

None of the Gospels written by Apostles. Mark's Gospel, the earliest biography of our Lord, became the basis of Matthew's and of Luke's

It is unwise to be too positive about any point in early Christian history. But it is difficult to resist the conclusion that all the four canonical Gospels except Luke's appeared anonymously—they seem to have been regarded as the property of the different Churches—and that none of them were written by the Apostles. A whole generation was allowed to pass before the first sustained biography of our Lord was written, and there is point in the criticism that a Gospel and a biography are not quite the same thing. But Mark will not be grudged the

honour of having carried through the great experiment some forty years perhaps after the Crucifixion.¹ His Gospel is of peculiar value as the earliest account which we have of the life and ministry of Jesus, and it became the chief foundation of the Gospels which followed.

The Church tradition on the origin of the Gospels is not very clear. It rests largely on a statement made in the fourth century by Eusebius, the earliest of ecclesiastical historians, who attributed to Papias, a Bishop of Hierapolis in the second century, the following words:—

“The Elder said this also: Mark, having become the interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately everything that he remembered, without, however, recording in order what was either said or done by Christ.”

The Elder, it seems, was the Elder John, a contemporary of Mark's. Eusebius adds:—

“So then Matthew composed the oracles (*τὰ λόγια*) in the Hebrew language, and each one interpreted them as he could.”

Papias' statement was neither appreciative nor accurate, and his opinion is not of great value. But it seems to be the first allusion to the history of the Gospels which Christian literature contains. The three generations which followed Mark's achievement have been described as the most obscure in the history of the Church.

Of Mark's life we know little beyond the tradition that he was a Jew of some standing in Jerusalem, related to Barnabas, who may have introduced him to the Apostles, and that he travelled with both Peter and Paul as companion, assistant and perhaps interpreter. He seems to have had useful practical qualities, and to have rendered loyal service to both leaders. And his relations with Peter seem to have been specially intimate and close. His Gospel was probably written for the

¹ Dr. Streeter inclines to date it A.D. 65. Other critics would put it a few years later. Professor Burkitt takes the years from 70 to 110 as the period of the writing of the Gospels. There are biblical students of authority who regard Mark's Gospel as to some extent a compilation, based on reminiscences of Peter's taken down by Mark.

important Church of Rome, and it owes its authority largely to his association with Peter, though the extent to which it represented Peter's opinions was one on which eminent authorities afterwards differed. Irenaeus thought it was written after Peter's death. Clement thought it was written during Peter's life but without his approval. Eusebius thought it was authorized by Peter, Jerome that Peter dictated it himself. Papias arrived at Jerome's opinion two or three hundred years earlier than he. But none of these suggestions seem to be founded on any accurate knowledge of the facts.

As time passed Mark's Gospel fell a little out of favour with the Fathers of the Church. St. Augustine, who believed Matthew's Gospel to be the earliest—into such errors might even the greatest of the Fathers fall—spoke of Mark as "a sort of lackey and abridger of Matthew." His Gospel has been criticized for its style and grammar, for its discursiveness and repetitions, for giving a barer narrative than the other Evangelists, and for telling us less than they about the teaching of Jesus. There may be passages in it which are neither Mark's nor Peter's work. But we must remember that Mark's story stands nearer to the actual facts than any other biography, is more independent than the later versions, and perhaps less influenced by currents of opinion in the early Churches. Both the beginning and the ending of the Gospel in its original form are abrupt. Mark tells us there nothing about the infancy of Jesus, hardly anything about the Resurrection, and nothing about the Appearances which followed. Eusebius stated that the oldest and best manuscripts ended with the words "for they were afraid" in chapter xvi. verse 8, and a good many manuscripts, though not the majority, support this view. The abrupt ending is so remarkable that the theory has been put forward that the earliest versions of the Gospel must have appeared in a mutilated form. The verses following in our authorized edition, known as the Longer Conclusion,¹ and thought by some to be unlike Mark's writing in style, may have been added early,

¹ In a few MSS. a Shorter Conclusion is found. In the fifth century, Dr. Streeter reminds us, there were current still three different endings of Mark, the Longer Conclusion, the Augmented Longer Conclusion, and the Shorter Conclusion.

and seem to have been known in Rome before the four Gospels received the official sanction of the Church.

Mark drew his facts, no doubt, partly from oral traditions—the recollections of Peter, if he could draw on them freely, must have been invaluable to him—and partly from such notes on the story and teaching of Jesus as had been put into shape for the instruction of Christian congregations. Some scholars have conjectured that he worked on an earlier biographical document, to which the name of Proto-Mark or Ur-marcus has been given. But whether that view be well founded or not does not greatly matter: Mark's Gospel stands as the first authentic Life of our Lord. Apart from the conjectured Ur-marcus and any other short narratives embodying oral traditions—and dealing especially perhaps with stories of the Passion, on which the interest of worshippers was concentrated from a very early date—Mark obviously would have made use of such sayings, parables and discourses of Jesus as were available to him for consultation. Many traditions and stories must have been circulating in those dim days, changing their shapes and adapting themselves perhaps unconsciously but instinctively to the requirements of the growing faith. Nothing could prevent the increase of such stories or of the pious legends which followed in their wake. Later on we find Eusebius charging even a man of standing like Papias with adding some "surprising" parables and a number of "wholly mythical" legends to the store. Even as early as Mark's day the process had begun. Imagination may be very powerful where intense devotion is at work.

Mark's labours bore a noble fruit. Matthew and Luke based their biographies of Jesus principally on his. "Matthew," writes Professor Burkitt, "is a *fresh edition* of Mark, revised, rearranged, and enriched with new materials. Luke is a new historical work made by combining parts of Mark with parts of other documents." No abstract theories about copyright interfered with Luke's or Matthew's freedom; and the extent to which they appropriated, altered, cut and enlarged Mark's material will be obvious on any comparison. Matthew, it has been calculated, used ninety per cent of Mark's material, Luke

over fifty per cent. Of Mark's six or seven hundred verses Matthew reproduced in substance, according to Dr. Streeter's estimate, over six hundred, while he compressed Mark's more diffuse style. Luke showed more independence. Though he used Mark with the fullest liberty, he used also more material taken from elsewhere. Matthew and Luke have in common some two hundred verses which are not found in Mark, consisting mostly of discourses; and the question arises where did this additional material come from. They must both have drawn to some extent upon fresh sources, and have used them, Matthew the more sparingly and Luke the more lavishly, to supplement the narrative which Mark supplied. But the consideration of that question belongs more properly to the story of the two Synoptic Gospels which followed.

III

Dates and origins of the Gospels. Additional materials employed by Matthew and Luke. Their free use and adaptation of Mark's work. The wide discrepancies in the three Synoptic books

Matthew's Gospel was written several years later, twenty years or more, it may be, after Mark's. And Luke's was probably written about the same time. Certainty in regard to these dates is not possible; expert authorities differ. But it is not improbable that the First and the Third and the Fourth Gospels may all date from the last decade of the first century—the Fourth Gospel being the latest of the three, with a final chapter dating at least twenty years later still. Matthew, a Jewish Christian who never threw off his Jewish associations, lived, it seems, in Syria or Asia Minor, and wrote possibly for the well-known Church at Antioch. Rome, Antioch, Ephesus and Achaia were, after the fall of Jerusalem and before the great days of the Church of Alexandria, the four chief centres of the rising faith. Luke, many scholars of distinction still believe, was the physician and the companion of St. Paul, who

wrote also the Acts of the Apostles.¹ He has been associated with Greece, as John the Fourth Evangelist has been associated with Ephesus. Remote as the dawn of Christianity may seem, it is yet a matter of surprise that our knowledge of these famous books and of the men who wrote them should be so imperfect as it is. One is forced again to reflect how little in point of accuracy and completeness the mass of primitive traditions accumulated by devoted Christians in those early ages may be worth.

The most important material which Luke used to amplify Mark's narrative was a collection of Sayings of Jesus which has since disappeared. Of the value of this source, now generally known as Q from the German word *Quelle* (Source), there is no question. The great majority of scholars are agreed that the sayings (λόγια) which appear in Matthew and in Luke, and are not based upon Mark's Gospel, are mostly or very largely taken from this document Q. But it is of course possible that some of the sayings, discourses and parables come from other fragments of the same nature preserved among the local Churches, and that some may even be based on oral traditions.² We cannot tell how far such collections existed—they may still have been plentiful—when the Evangelists wrote. And Q itself may have been receiving additions all the time, as the demand for instruction in the teaching of Jesus increased.

Dr. Streeter has argued with some force that Luke may have drawn his fresh materials not only from Q but from a larger document in which Q was embodied, a rough draft of an earlier Gospel, which he has named Proto-Luke, and designated by the letters Q + L. And in the same way, he has suggested, Matthew also may have drawn upon materials outside Q for some of the passages peculiar to him. This fourth possible source or document he has designated M, and has added to the three others. A plurality of sources is not an unlikely thing. Each of the local Churches may have developed

¹ But some distinguished scholars doubt this. An unknown writer might have used Luke's diary. And there are statements in the Third Gospel and in the Acts which it seems almost impossible to attribute to a man who was an intimate companion of Paul and thoroughly familiar with Paul's writings.

² How far the *Logia* contained discourses as well as sayings we do not know.

collections and traditions of its own. Many such ingenious possibilities suggest themselves where we know so little for certain. But it may be sufficient for our purpose to remember that the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, if founded primarily upon Mark's, were amplified from other records, from sayings and discourses, narratives and fragments, among which the ancient collection known as Q holds the most conspicuous if not the only place.¹

Both Matthew and Luke endeavoured to refine and improve upon Mark's version. They treated any materials which they embodied in their Gospels with great freedom, arranged the sayings and discourses of their Master with conscious and deliberate skill. Matthew sometimes broke up passages which Luke put together. He was fond, to use an ugly word, of agglomerating, piecing together scattered fragments and welding them into a perfect whole. In every one of the five great discourses, which Matthew took over from an earlier authority, Dr. Streeter has found evidence of agglomerations of this kind.² Matthew's Sermon on the Mount is in effect Luke's Sermon on the Plain very largely expanded. Four times, starting from a short discourse in Mark, Matthew expands it into a long sermon. Matthew's tenth chapter is made up of four fragments, first, the account of the mission of the Twelve, taken from Mark, secondly, the discourse on the sending-out of the Seventy, taken probably from Q, thirdly, two appropriate passages from elsewhere in Mark, and fourthly, some matter peculiar to Matthew. Luke often substitutes for a section of Mark a different version from some other source. In one place he leaves out seventy-four consecutive verses of Mark,³ a long and notable omission. The authors of the First and Third Gospels were always editors, adapters and compilers, and they took full advantage of the privileges they claimed.

Again, the discrepancies in the three Synoptic Gospels must not be forgotten by those who wish to judge of their historical

¹ The four-document theory (that Matthew and Luke are founded on Mark's Gospel, Q, Proto-Luke and M) has been amplified by German ingenuity into an eight-document theory of sources, carrying these speculations further than it seems necessary to go here.

² See Matthew, chaps. v-vii, x, xiii, xviii, xxiv-xxv. ³ Mark vi 45-viii. 26.

value. The Birth Stories introduced into Matthew's and Luke's Gospels, and ignored by the other Evangelists, have been referred to already and will be considered again. The irreconcilable pedigrees, the contradictory chronology, the variations in the discourses and the stories of the miracles, the widely different accounts given by Mark and Luke of John the Baptist's preaching and of the Baptism and Temptation of our Lord—Matthew, we are reminded, has combined the two versions and most people forget how different they are—and above all, the deep divergences in the Gospel accounts of the Passion, the Resurrection and the Last Appearances of Jesus, cannot but force themselves on students of the Gospel history.

"The story of the Resurrection," says Professor Burkitt, "the words from the Cross, the narrative of the Last Supper—in these we might have expected our authorities to agree, even in detail; but they do not agree."

These differences do not diminish the interest of the narratives, and they may all have some solid manuscript foundations. But when it comes to weighing fairly the evidences for the Gospel story, the fact that there are these varying statements must, if we seek the truth, be borne in mind.

IV

Exceptional position of the Fourth Gospel. Its author not a historian but a mystic and a seer. Can he be identified with John the Elder? His narrative with its allegories and symbolism differs widely from the Synoptic story. The influence of Gnostic ideas

In spite of variations and discrepancies, however, the three Synoptic Gospels stand together and the purport of their narratives is substantially the same. But the Fourth Gospel stands apart on a wholly different footing, and is often very difficult to reconcile with the others. The Christ of the Synoptic Gospels, one bold critic has declared, is historical but is not God: the Johannine Christ is divine but not historical. All commentators have agreed in paying homage to the com-

manding influence, the profound interest, the rare quality of John the Evangelist's work. But it will always be doubtful how far the author intended it to be regarded as a biography of Christ. He deliberately omits important episodes found in the Synoptic Gospels. He "is not a historian, he is a seer," who delights in allegories, subtleties and mystifications, with a mind for ever searching to discover some secondary and deeper meaning in the facts of life. The narratives of Mark and John cannot, Dr. Burkitt considers, be made to agree "except on the supposition that one or the other is, as regards objective facts, inaccurate and misleading." And not only are the differences between John and his Synoptic colleagues on some points acute; the narratives in the Fourth Gospel do not appear to be always reliable as history; and, fascinating as the discourses are, the words put into the mouth of our Lord do not always seem to come naturally from Him. John is admittedly "careless of events." He follows his own theories, works out his own ideas. He was trying perhaps to substitute for the coming of the Messiah, for the new Kingdom prophesied as imminent which had not yet arrived, some surer and less temporary expectation.

"If I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart I will send him unto you."

With John it is "the thoughts on God and man" which matter. Christianity is not only the teaching of Jesus, but something enduring and unchanging, a mystery which opens for us the approach to the divine.

Of the origin of the Fourth Gospel we have no exact knowledge. It was admittedly the latest of the four. The author may when he wrote have been quite an old man, and have brought a long life of study and contemplation to his task. A strong and early tradition assigned it to the beloved Apostle—it could only, thought Origen, be fully understood by one who had lain on the breast of Jesus—and that tradition has not perhaps been altogether abandoned yet. But it is supported by no evidence except a statement made at the end of the Gospel,¹ which is

¹ Chapter xxi, verse 24

now generally agreed to be a note added later by another hand. The Apostle John died not improbably years before the Gospel was written, and there is no strong ground for connecting him with Ephesus. Of the four Evangelists we cannot identify with certainty either the First or the Fourth. But the opinion that the latter was very possibly the figure faintly known to us as John the Elder, whom Papias referred to, who may conceivably have been a pupil of the Beloved Apostle, and who wrote in the Greek city of Ephesus and primarily for the Ephesian Church, has gained ground in recent years among those qualified to judge.

Regarded as a biography of Jesus the Fourth Gospel is full of interesting, impressive, tender touches, and the narrative may have behind it special memories and associations of the author's own. But when we compare it with the Synoptic Gospels there are many difficulties to solve. Why does the writer, one wonders, so often go out of his way to differ from his predecessors? Why is his chronology so unlike theirs?¹ Why does he attribute to our Lord in His discussions with the Jews language which sometimes repels us? Was not Professor Burkitt right in doubting whether the historical Jesus of the Synoptic Gospels would have argued with opponents quite as He is here represented to have done? Is it not curious that the accounts of the Baptism and the Last Supper should fail to mention the two central facts—the actual baptism of Jesus in the one case and the solemn words alleged to have instituted the Eucharist in the other?² Why are two famous miracles peculiar to this Gospel, the resurrection of Lazarus and the changing of the water into wine at the marriage-feast, so difficult to understand that commentators are driven to suggest symbolical interpretations for them? If the resurrection of

¹ It is possible that John may be more accurate than the Synoptists in dating the Crucifixion on the day of the Passover, and the Last Supper on the night before that.

² These words are transferred by John to the Galilean episodes and discussions which followed the feeding of the five thousand (chap. vi). But are we prepared to accept as the authentic words of Jesus verses 51 to 58 of that chapter? M. Loisy's notes on these verses in the revised edition of *Le Quatrième Evangile* (1921, pp. 240 sq.) are worth consideration.

Lazarus was a fact why do Mark and Luke, who must have been aware of it, ignore it altogether? Are there behind the story of the marriage-feast strange subtleties of meaning or association, which link this apparently simple episode with reminiscences of Dionysus and old Pagan cults? Can we ever be quite sure that we have grasped the full intention of that high, imaginative, elusive mind? And does the explanation of the miracle in Cana offered by one distinguished commentator—that “water stands in this Gospel for what is still but symbol,” that “wine is the blood of the new covenant,” and that the new wine symbolizes “the joyous freshness of Jesus’ ministerial beginnings,” really make anything clearer or carry conviction to a candid mind?

The Fourth Gospel, Canon Streeter and other commentators recall to us, is a meditation on the life of Christ by a mystic of genius who was also a philosopher and a poet. The Evangelist stands between the two worlds where Plato and Isaiah meet, in touch with the religious side of Hellenic philosophy, but a Jew first and never quite a Greek. He makes an allegory of the story of Jesus, treats perhaps to some extent as allegories not only the miracles but the matters of fact which he relates. His object was to proclaim a new philosophy on which Christian theology could in the future be based. The Church at Ephesus at the end of the first century had its own preoccupations. It has been described as fighting on two fronts. Inside the Church the dominant Jewish party was sound in its ethics and firmly monotheistic in its views, but conservative and narrow in its outlook. Christianity had to advance beyond that attitude if it was to appeal to the Hellenic world. And both inside and outside the Christian Church there were Gnostic theories beginning to influence opinion, which caused grave perplexity to some thoughtful minds.

These Gnostic theories, though not fully developed when the Fourth Gospel was written, came to include many forms of curious theosophy. They were based on the idea that matter was essentially evil. From this it followed that the material universe could not be the creation of the supreme God who represented goodness, but must owe its origin to an inferior

Deity who represented what was evil and impure. From this dangerous influence, from the dark and threatening spirits who sought to intercept the soul on its passage to Heaven, the true God had sent His emissary Christ to deliver mankind. Christ was divine. His human body was a semblance only: the flesh and all its works belonged to the lower world of impure material things; and it was in semblance only that Christ could have died upon the Cross. This theory of the dualism of good and evil, the God of the Gospel as opposed to the God of the Law, which Marcion, the most interesting of the Gnostic leaders, was soon to develop for the further disturbance of the Church, struck at the root of the monotheism for which both Judaism and Christianity stood. It opened the way to all sorts of bewildering speculations, and these speculations were not without their influence on early Christian seekers after truth.

The theories sometimes took fantastic shapes. One Gnostic leader laid it down that from the first principle, the Father, there issued Nous, the Mind; from Nous issued Logos, the Word; from Logos Phronesis, Thoughtfulness or Prudence; from Phronesis Sophia and Dynamis, Wisdom and Power; and from these first beings the virtues, powers and angels. These peopled the first heaven; but there were 365 heavens, of which only the last and the lowest was perceptible by man. In this heaven, occupied by angels presided over by the sinister God of the Jews, conflicts arose; and those conflicts were ended only by the intervention of Nous, an emissary from the supreme Father, who took on himself, in the person of Jesus, the appearance of a mortal man. To us these theories and others like them may seem to be extravagant and unreal. But as the early generations passed, they were often in the minds of those who were striving to evolve the doctrines of the new-born faith. And echoes of them occupied and may possibly have clouded the thoughts of Christian theologians for centuries to come.¹

¹ On Gnostic theories and Gnostic leaders, see, among other writers, Loisy (*La Naissance du Christianisme*, 315-42 and 368-403).

v

The Fourth Evangelist's endeavour to restate Christian doctrine in a form acceptable to Greek philosophy. The doctrine of the Logos, of the Word made flesh. John's "Spiritual Gospel." Dr. Inge's summary of its value to the world

John the Evangelist, it seems, set to work to develop his theology in order to prevent confusion and disappointment in the early Church. He wished to concentrate the attention of Christians on the coming of the Comforter rather than on the visible return of Christ. He wished also to re-state Christian doctrine in a form acceptable to Greek philosophy, while true to the Jewish conception of one omnipotent and personal God. He cared little for what was already becoming almost the conventional biography of Jesus. He ignored, if he knew, Matthew's and Luke's stories of the Master's miraculous birth. He gave no encouragement to Gnostic illusions. To him Christ was no unsubstantial phantom but was truly and completely man; His human experience must never be forgotten. But Christ was also the incarnate Word of God and a part of the divinity of God Himself.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

The same was in the beginning with God.

All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made.

In him was life; and the life was the light of men.

And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not. . . .

And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth."

Into the value of this philosophical conception, which became the subject of endless speculations, it is not possible to enter fully here. It has little to do with the biography of Jesus of Nazareth. But it is not easy to exaggerate its importance in providing new ground for Christian theology to build on, while

keeping in touch with contemporary thought. If the tendency of the earlier Gospels was to make more and more of the idea of Christianity as a religion freed from Jewish limitations and thrown open for all the world to share, the Fourth Gospel is the climax in that process of development "towards the naturalization of Christianity in the Hellenic world."

The theory of the Logos, so mysterious, so venerable, so easy to speculate upon, so difficult to understand, has been since the days of the Evangelist adopted as a sacred tradition of the Church, and many men unversed in dim theosophies have been content to pay a wondering homage to it, and to turn back from its simple words of lofty speculation to the still loftier simplicity of Jesus Christ. Yet it forces on us questions to which it is difficult to reply. Are we able to interpret this puzzling doctrine clearly, if we endeavour to interpret it at all? What did the philosophers and theologians who originated it mean by it? What exactly did the Evangelist mean by it? How far do those, to whom it falls to explain it in these days to the Church of England, regard it now as a clear and definite part of our beliefs? Are we satisfied to have our views on that unconquerable problem, the origin of all things human and divine, settled for us in the twentieth century by even the noblest exponent of mystical theology in a primitive age? The Fourth Evangelist is alone responsible for identifying the Word or Reason of the philosophers with Christ. The theory has no place in the Synoptic Gospels or generally in the teaching of Jesus. And if any words used by Him in the Fourth Gospel discourses are interpreted as giving it support, those discourses, it must be remembered, were put into His mouth by the Evangelist and have no authority behind them except his.

We know that, when the theory of the Logos found its way into the Gospel, ecclesiastical leaders made it their own, largely perhaps because it helped to solve perplexities and divisions in the early Church. But beyond that tradition of eighteen centuries no more special sanctity attaches to it than attaches to the profound and moving meditations of other high-minded Christian men. We are told on authority that it "contains an intellectualist, static, determinist, abstractive

trend." But that may seem a hard saying to men of simple minds. We are told, by Professor Burkitt, that for the Fourth Evangelist Christianity was not only the earthly life of Jesus; it was a timeless and eternal state of mind. And we are told by Dr. Inge, who writes of the Fourth Gospel with deep sympathy and understanding, that to the Evangelist the Logos was not merely the Instrument in the original creation, but the central Life, the timeless Life of which the temporal world is a manifestation, the Mind or Wisdom by which the universe is animated and upheld.¹

The special characteristics of the Fourth Gospel are the idealism, the mysticism and the symbolism which pervade it, and on which its philosophy is built. For the Evangelist certain divine ideas, Light and Truth, Life and Love, are eternal attributes of God, who may indeed be identified with them. Mysticism is the atmosphere in which he thinks and writes. And his love of symbolism runs through the whole story, narrative and discourses alike, making it into a "spiritual Gospel," as some early Fathers were quick to perceive. Clement of Alexandria is quoted by Eusebius as saying that "John last, having observed that the bodily things had been exhibited in the (other) Gospels, exhorted by his friends and inspired by the Holy Ghost, composed a spiritual Gospel." With the Jews and Judaic ideas John had little sympathy. The Messiah disappears in the Logos. With the ideas of St. Paul, on the other hand, a mystic like himself, his sympathy was profound.

"The doctrine of love is for both the crown of their ethical teaching. St. Paul's triad is Faith, Hope, Love, St. John's is Light, Life and Love."

The Evangelist does not discuss the all-important term Logos with which his Prologue opens; he treats it as one familiar to his readers. Philo, the well-known Jewish philosopher who was practically contemporary with St. Paul, had already blended the Greek and Jewish ideas of the Logos. His "Word" was the

¹ The writer wishes to express his special obligations in these pages to Dr. W. R. Inge's volume on *Christian Mysticism* (1899), and to his essay on "The Theology of the Fourth Gospel" in the volume of *Cambridge Biblical Essays* edited by Professor Swete in 1909.

Logos of the Stoics Platonized, and his conception of it must have been known to many of his readers. But for Philo John's conception of the Word being made flesh could have had no definite meaning. The Evangelist transformed the Logos of the philosopher when he identified it with Jesus, who, as the Logos of the Gospel, had been from all eternity "in close relation to God." The Logos became not only the divine thought and reason, but the complete revelation of God's character and self-sacrificing love. It may be allowable to quote here Dr. Inge's summary of the permanent value of the Logos doctrine:—

"There are many critics, both in Germany and England, who consider that St. John tried to weld together history and metaphysics, and spoilt both. They regard the Logos-doctrine as the chief achievement of that 'Hellenizing' of Christianity which they deplore, and wish to sweep it away, along with the mediæval scholasticism which (they think) has laid heavy burdens on faith. On the other side, it may be said that the metaphysical problems to which the Logos-theology gives an answer are problems which we cannot leave alone, for our opinions about the relations of God to the world and mankind must be the foundation of all rational action. It is also unduly pessimistic to regard as valueless the fruit of the long religious experience of Greece and Israel thus happily combined. Even when crystallized into dogma, this idea has been the framework of great systems of philosophy; and now that 'divine immanence' is so much talked of, it should be found to correspond with some of the most characteristic thoughts and aspirations of our time. In any case it is historically true that 'the Logos became flesh' is the formula which won Europe to Christianity, and that the authoritative formularies of the Church's faith are stamped with the impress of the Fourth Gospel."

VI

The descent and growth of Christian Mysticism. Views of early Fathers and of later teachers. The Pseudo-Dionysius. Mediaeval mystics and their successors. The search for communion with the divine

Some perhaps may question whether a doctrine so difficult for any but theologians and philosophers to master could have had the large share in winning Europe to Christianity which is suggested here. Even Athanasius, Gibbon's irony reminds us, confessed that "whenever he forced his understanding to meditate on the divinity of the *Logos*, his toilsome and unavailing efforts recoiled on themselves; that the more he thought, the less he comprehended; and the more he wrote, the less capable was he of expressing his thoughts." Yet it is beyond question that from the theory of the Word made flesh there descended for centuries many currents of interesting and perplexing thought. The field of Christian Mysticism supplied a boundless territory for ardent spirits to explore. The aim of those who travelled in it was to realize the presence of God in nature and in the soul of man, and to learn by personal holiness and strenuous self-discipline to know and to be joined with Him. In the early Christian ages dogma was so fluid that speculation was not easy to restrain. And for many generations afterwards thinkers of enterprising minds would turn away from formulas and conventions which constrained them, to breathe as Christian Mystics "an ampler ether, a diviner air." Paul's teaching about the person of Christ had been in many ways as mystical as John's.

"We all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the spirit of the Lord."

Clement of Alexandria, who counted Origen among his pupils, and regarded Greek philosophy as part of the divine education of men, laboured to develop the same mysterious theology, to find a way of answering all questionings and of enabling the

perfect Christian philosopher to rest at last in the contemplation of God. Purity and love were to Clement the essence of religion; purity, as he defined it, was "to think holy things." Faith was "a summary knowledge of urgent truths, suitable for people who are in a hurry." Did he ask himself how far those words would apply to the primitive thinkers who built up—too hurriedly perhaps—some of the dogmas of the early Church? Plotinus, fifty years after Clement—Christian Neoplatonists identified the Logos with the Nous of Plotinus—contributed from the world of philosophy his noble thought and fine ideals. And Augustine arranged the ascent of the soul in seven stages, rising at last by purgation and illumination to the vision of the divine.

Stranger teachers presently appeared. The amazing success of the Pseudo-Dionysius in assuming the name of St. Paul's Athenian convert, and thus fathering his doctrines indirectly on St. Paul, is very significant of the uncritical credulity which in the fifth and sixth centuries swayed theological thought. Mediaeval thinkers swallowed the imposture whole. Dionysius' singular jargon was accepted. His descriptions of God the Father as "super-essential Indetermination," "super-rational Unity," "unspoken Word," do not seem to have troubled his readers, and may have had some fascination for scholastic minds. His system of Christian and Mystical philosophy, his pictures of the Celestial Hierarchy in Heaven and of the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy on earth, appealed to sacerdotal instincts and held generations apparently entranced. Erigena, one of the most daring of the schoolmen, translated the works of Dionysius into Latin and greatly increased their vogue in the West. Thomas Aquinas, the Angelic Doctor, is said to have drunk deeply of the Dionysian wells. Peter Lombard regarded him as the chief authority for the angelic orders. Grosseteste, Colet, Grocyn wrote and lectured on him. Dante and Milton acknowledged his spell.

Gradually, it seems, the Evangelist's doctrine of the Logos lost its hold. Catholic Mysticism abandoned some of the earlier ideals. Men of independent spirit, thirteenth and fourteenth century Mystics in Germany especially, took their own way,

and it was not a way which led to an increased respect for the authority of priests.

“What is the good of the dead bones of saints?” asked Meister Eckhart bluntly. “It is better to feed the hungry than to see the vision of St. Paul.”

The immediate heirs of these men may have had little sympathy with their ideas; they took little part directly in the great sixteenth century revolt. But their spiritual successors in every country, men not of one generation only, still pursued their high adventure, still sought by self-discipline and ardent contemplation to attain to union with the divine. That search for the Vision Splendid, lit by some inner light, has never been abandoned. The impulse which induces men to seek for it has many names—conscience; duty; an innate sense of holiness; the pressure of God upon our thoughts; the presence in us of a power not ourselves that makes for righteousness; or even the “fringe of intuition” which, modern philosophy tells us, “lingers all around intelligence”; named or un-named the disturbing, imperishable thing is there;

“A longing to enquire
Into the mystery of this heart which beats
So wild, so deep in us—to know
Whence our thoughts come and where they go”

Religion is not bounded by theology. Ecclesiastical traditions crumble: but the unceasing quest of mortality for something immortal and divine goes on.

It may seem rash in these days to take it for granted that the instinct for good is stronger than the instinct for evil in mankind. But mystic ideals may yet appeal—there are signs that they are increasingly appealing—to some who question whether our religion has been settled for ever by formulas doubtfully arrived at a thousand or two thousand years ago. As one reviews the unlovely history of the battles waged all through the ages to ensure the triumph of this or that doctrine of the Christian Church, one cannot but realize afresh what a gulf separates that history from the personal teaching of Jesus

Christ, which is the real strength and beauty of the four Gospels inherited by us :

“This is my commandment, That ye love one another as I have loved you.”

Simple words, but echoed for us in the Epistle to the Romans with a grandeur we cannot forget :

“For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come,

Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”¹

VII

Manuscript texts of the New Testament. Apocryphal and uncanonical books. Growth of legends round the Bible story, and traces of them in the authorized texts

Mystics have their own methods of approaching religion, and their methods may cut many a Gordian knot. But if we are to keep a balanced judgment on the history of the early Church it is well to remember how little certitude there is about many traditions which took shape in the hundred and fifty years immediately following the Crucifixion. There must have been a large number of oral records, among which those in authority had to choose. As written records increased, the incertitude was added to by differences appearing in the manuscripts. The standard text of the New Testament represents approximately the Byzantine Text found in the majority of manuscripts, the text which Erasmus was the first to print, which Paris revised in 1550, and which the English Authorized

¹ It may be added here that nothing could illustrate better the revolution in knowledge and thought which the Biblical and critical studies of the last sixty or seventy years have brought about, than a comparison between the commentary on The Fourth Gospel published by Dr Westcott in 1881, and representing the high-water mark of Cambridge criticism then, and the volume on the same subject, with its valuable bibliographical survey of the material now available, published by Dr. W. F. Howard in 1931.

Version adopted. But for many years, and in the third century especially, there was an infinity of variations between the local texts. We have to get back to the local Churches to find out what the authors really wrote.

The Byzantine text probably originated in Antioch and was revised about A.D. 300. After that date the papyrus rolls were generally replaced by fine codexes on parchment in book form. The great Sees like Rome, Antioch and Alexandria had their own Greek texts, and Latin, Syriac or Coptic texts based on them. Research into the pedigree of a manuscript, it has been laid down, should begin with a study of its text of Mark. African Christianity most likely came from Rome. Constantinople took its text and its theology from Antioch, and the Ephesus text after a time succumbed to the new standard. Constantine asked Eusebius to prepare fifty copies of the Scriptures on vellum for churches in his new city. Vellum written manuscripts were wonderfully enduring; there are some in existence sixteen hundred years old. If Eusebius carried out the order, he would, it is thought, have followed the text he used at Caesarea. The history of these great manuscripts is a very ancient and interesting story, which speaks volumes for the patience and learning of the scholars to whom our knowledge of them is due. But the more we know of them, the more there is brought home to us the possibility of inaccuracies in them, and the unwisdom of making too positive assertions about any statement written or reported in the years when the foundations of our Gospel narratives were being laid.

Round the four great Gospels destined to receive official sanction there grew up in the first and second centuries an increasing mass of secondary materials, Apocryphal Gospels, collections of legends, picturesque, imaginary myths. Enthusiasts and visionaries among the early worshippers were quick to circulate any story which enhanced the fame of Christ. Apocalyptic writings interpreting Jewish traditions found their way into Christian literature; the readiness to adopt them as authentic shows how much liberty existed in working up for Christian purposes Messianic materials and ideas. We are told

that the Revelation of Peter was known in Rome and was read on Good Fridays in some churches in Palestine. Ancient manuscripts included in the Bible Apocalypses of Paul, Thomas and Stephen, and Epistles by Barnabas, Ignatius and Clement. A seventh-century list brings up to sixty the total number of the Bible books. When the Canon of the New Testament was fixed there were a good many apocryphal books to be excluded, Gospels of Peter and Philip and Thomas and Bartholomew, a Gospel of the Egyptians and a Gospel of the Ebionites; the Ebionites were vegetarians who declined to eat locusts, and they held other opinions less easy to allow. The Gospel according to the Hebrews, preserved to us chiefly by Jerome, was justly regarded as of very high reputation, and was for a time believed to be a Hebrew form of the Gospel of Matthew. Origen has a curious little comment on one passage in it.

"If any accept the Gospel according to the Hebrews, where the Saviour Himself saith, 'Even now did my mother the Holy Spirit take me by one of mine hairs, and carried me away unto the great mountain Thabor,' he will be perplexed."¹

There were Acts of John and Paul and Thomas and Pilate, and a lost book on the Birth of Mary which was alleged to contain "horrible and deadly things." There was an "immense crowd of smaller writings" which claimed to supplement the Bible, and which may often have tempted scribes and redactors to embellish and improve upon the authentic story. There were many narratives of the Passion and of the life of the Virgin, many a legend, appealing and imaginative, primitive and simple, shading away into folklore and romance.

It was inevitable that legends of this type should spring up, and almost as inevitable that traces of them should find their way into the Gospel-story. The tales of the infancy of Jesus, of His family's history and of His confidences to His disciples, are often full of naivety and charm. We have a sketch of the life of

¹ Quoted from Dr. M. R. James' *Apocryphal New Testament* (p. 2), a storehouse of interesting materials, which shows how inextricably legends were woven into the Christian literature of early days. Origen's sentence is thought to refer to the Temptation; the Hebrew word for spirit is feminine. On the uncanonical Gospels see also Jossy (*La Naissance du Christianisme*, 61-9).

Joseph the Carpenter, "the father of Jesus according to the flesh," supposed to have been told by the Saviour on Mount Olivet and taken down by His disciples. It reveals that Joseph married at forty and lived with his first wife and family till he was eighty-nine. Then came the mysterious marriage with Mary, after which he survived till the age of a hundred and eleven. We have a story of John the Baptist in Heaven, also based on the authority of the Saviour—John is busied in ferrying Christian believers in a golden boat across the river of fire; and another story in which the Saviour describes to the disciples the delightful fruits of Paradise—the vine with the thousand bunches of grapes, each bunch producing six "met-rites" of wine, the palm trees which yield ten thousand dates from every cluster, the apple-trees and fig-trees each shoot of which produces ten thousand apples or figs. And we have an account, confided by the Saviour to Bartholomew, of His own descent into Hades, when He vanished away from the Cross, to bring up at the Archangel Michael's entreaty Adam and all the righteous dead.

The Book of James, which Origen refers to, and which centuries later was named the *Potevangelium*, gives us in picturesque and romantic detail the wonderful story of Mary's infancy and the yet more wonderful story which grew up about the Saviour's birth. Attention will be drawn to that again. But many of these apocryphal writings were far more picturesque than veracious, and may well have contributed elements of confusion to the history and even to the doctrines of the early Church. Origen was justly critical of those who attempted to write gospels "without the needful gifts of grace." It must have checked the flow of invention—it may also have killed some materials worth preserving—when these unauthentic manuscripts were declared to be unworthy of the sanction of the Church.

VIII

Influence of Paul's Epistles and of Gnostic theories. Marcion's views and activities. The official Canon of the Four Gospels sanctioned about A.D. 180

Two powerful influences affected the writing of the Gospels from outside, first, the force and conviction of St. Paul's Epistles and, secondly, the efforts of the Gnostic teachers to fasten their views upon the rising Church. We cannot assume that Paul was the author of all the Epistles which bear his name. Marcion the Gnostic, a professed admirer of the Apostle, credited him with ten only, and others would disallow his claims to some of these. Yet it is probably to this famous heretic that the great preponderance of Pauline theology in the New Testament is due. It is quite possible that Marcion, in his efforts to establish a recognized version of the New Testament, was the first to make a collection of St. Paul's Epistles, which in the earlier part of the second century may still have been in a fragmentary form and comparatively little known. No one can say how far they were subjected to editing and interpolation before they took shape as we know them now.

Paul's work was characteristically independent. He took his own line. For him the centre of the Gospel was the Cross of Christ. For the other Apostles it was the Second Coming of their Lord. Peter, like many Jews, found the Crucifixion a grievous stumbling-block. But the Resurrection swept that difficulty away, and the tragic story was accepted as a part, though a startling part, of God's design. Paul neither flinched nor hesitated here. In a time of doubt and confusion he threw himself intrepidly into the heart of the questions which Christians were discussing day by day. Was Jesus a human Messiah or the Incarnate Son of God? Was His body flesh and blood, and did He die as a man, not as a semblance only, on the Cross? Could they believe in the immortality of the soul and in the resurrection of the body? Was Jewish law binding upon them or not? Paul's theories in their entirety may not have been accepted by the Church; some devout worshippers may

have been bewildered by them. But Paul's triumphant tones rang on. He gave a lead where a lead was wanted. When men find themselves doubtful, puzzled or divided, it is the leader of deep conviction and strong courage who prevails.

It may seem strange that the most distinguished of the Gnostic leaders should have been in many respects a reverent disciple of St Paul. Yet Marcion about the middle of the second century came very near to reshaping the history of the Church. There could be no question of his sincerity and ardour. He preached and practised a fine austerity. He was probably a deeper thinker than most of the theologians of his day. He laboured steadily to secure for the young Church an authentic gospel and a firmer faith, to restore in all its beautiful simplicity the teaching of Jesus, to settle the form which the New Testament and the creed embodied in it should take. But his Gnostic theories prevented his triumph: these could not be accepted by the Church: and his followers, though they remained for some generations numerous and powerful, became from the time of Constantine onwards a discouraged and persecuted sect.

Marcion, like other Gnostics, believed in an unending struggle between the spiritual and the material, the good and the evil, in the world. There was a Power or Deity presiding over the forces of evil, inferior to but constantly contending with the Deity who commanded the forces of good. This evil Deity was the God of the Law, of the Jews, of the Old Testament. He must not be identified with, he was the rival and the enemy of, the sublime and benevolent Deity, the God of the new Gospel till of late unknown. It was the supreme and transcendent God of goodness who had revealed Himself in Jesus, and had sent His son in the semblance of a man to save and deliver mankind. It must not be forgotten that the leaders of the Church, if they showed themselves too anxious to associate their Christology with supernatural and unearthly glories, preserved at least for Christianity the real humanity of Christ. Man, Marcion laid it down, was governed by three principles or forces, Matter, of which he was made, Justice or Law, by which he came into being, and Grace, by which he

could be purified and redeemed. Jesus was God's messenger of Grace and the adversary of Satan; Satan was the sinister Deity of the Old Testament and the old Law. Jesus, prevailing in the conflict with Satan, had bought back the whole race of mankind, and had restored them for ever to the keeping of the God of the New Testament and the new Law.

The belief that the Redemption was in its essence an act by which man was bought by God from the Devil, was widely held among early theologians for many centuries after Christ. It was acknowledged by famous authorities, by Irenaeus, by Origen and by Augustine. It was not till the distant days of Anselm of Canterbury, Archbishop, philosopher and canonized saint, that the idea fell into discredit, and was replaced by a theory of Anselm's not unlike Marcion's own. This theory represented the sacrifice of Christ as a debt paid by God's Mercy to God's Justice. The world was governed by Justice which could not forgive, and Mercy could only intervene by paying the price to Justice.¹ The mediaeval Church and the theologians who ruled it were content, perhaps relieved, to accept this idea.

If Marcion's philosophy lapsed into heresy, he yet rendered memorable service to the Church. It was he who, more perhaps than any man, brought home to his contemporaries the need of establishing an authorized edition of the New Testament. No doubt, he adapted the available materials as he thought best: Tertullian called his adaptation of Luke a massacre: but he only omitted passages which conflicted directly with the special doctrines he professed. At least he made the Christian leaders realize the need for some selection, for some canon of the Gospels officially sanctioned and separated from the apocryphal and legendary Gospels growing up. The Church had waited for this too long already, till the figure of Jesus was fading into legend and His personal teaching was in some danger of being forgotten. It was not satisfactory that there should be several local Gospels circulating, and serious discrepancies of statement in those which were best known. An attempt to combine

¹ See Professor Burkitt's interesting study of Marcion (*The Gospel History and its Transmission*, 289 sq.) and Loisy (*La Naissance du Christianisme*, 391-403).

the four most famous ones was made by Tatian, and his *Diatessaron* held the field in certain places for a long time. But something more authoritative was required, and Marcion's energy brought matters to a head. Before the end of the second century, and probably by the year 180, the four outstanding Gospels, revised and modified, no doubt, but still containing many variations from each other, had received official sanction in great centres like Antioch, Ephesus and Rome. The Canon had been generally accepted by the Churches. The New Testament, substantially as we know it, though hardly the simple faith of the first followers of Jesus, had taken its time-honoured and familiar form.

CHAPTER IV

THE MAKING OF THE CREEDS

I

The *Doctrinal Report* on the authority of Church doctrines. How far is Supernaturalism essential to the Christian faith? Modern theological opinion on the credibility of miracles The popularity of superstitions: the cult of Becket

IN approaching this difficult subject—the history of the making of our Creeds—we shall do well to remember three brief sentences in the latest authoritative utterance of the English Church.

“All Christians are bound to allow very high authority to doctrines which the Church has been generally united in teaching.

At the same time . . . every individual ought to test his belief in practice, and, so far as his ability and training qualify him, to think out his own belief.

The Church should also recognise as necessary to the fulness of its own life the activity of those of its own members who carry forward the apprehension of truth by freely testing and criticising its traditional doctrines ”¹

Few more candid and large-minded statements have been issued by those to whom we look for ecclesiastical advice.

The most difficult question for those who do not wish to surrender their inheritance as Churchmen is the question how far they can accept as historical events reported in the Gospels which appear to conflict with human experience and natural laws. There is no harder problem to decide. To what extent must supernaturalism be regarded as an essential element in the Christian faith? There are, of course, miracles and miracles. Some are of comparatively little importance. Others, through having been made the basis of a vast fabric of sanctified tra-

¹ For the full context of these sentences, see *The Doctrinal Report*, p. 36.

ditions, could not be discarded without shaking that fabric almost to its foundations. Yet, whatever the consequences to venerable traditions, the search for truth and understanding will go on. The unexamined dogma is, as the unexamined life appeared to Plato, an intolerable thing. In the case of many alleged miracles the difficulty fades away under examination. It becomes obvious that the reports of them have no real evidence to rest on, that the facts have been exaggerated or misunderstood, that fancy, credulity and hallucination have magnified into something supernatural circumstances which, when properly interpreted, may prove to be ordinary enough. That, after all, is very much more likely than the suspension of the laws of nature to prove for the nonce the omnipotence of God. And the *Doctrinal Report* reminds us that the use of miracles to enforce belief appears to have been deliberately rejected by our Lord.

There is no need to labour the point here. It is evident that instructed clerical opinion does not now accept as historical all the miracles reported in connection with the ministry of Jesus. One able theologian dwells on the difficulties felt by modern minds in supposing that those portents could have occurred exactly as they are described. Another suggests that they may well prove capable of natural explanations. A third is confident that, if the first-century miracles had been wrought in the presence of trained spectators of the nineteenth century, the versions given of them would be quite different. A fourth declares that the historicity of miracles is a scientific and not a religious question, and that to regard them as the foundation of our religious faith would be a disastrous mistake. A fifth boldly refuses to treat the ancient beliefs about them as essential to Christianity now. And the men who have come to these conclusions are no heretics, but professors of theology and eminent divines. It is surely significant that they decline to accept without question all the wonders which the Gospels tell us that the Saviour wrought. Can we meet their warnings with the old assertion that such caution shows a want of reverence? Not in days when it is widely admitted that the truest reverence is the search for truth.

Faith inevitably borders on credulity: the frontier between them is not always easy to define. And credulity is the desire to live in a world of awe and wonder without using too actively our faculties of mind. Mediaevalism is still much in fashion with us, since the Oxford Movement gave it a new lease of life; it is not fully realised how many ordinary Englishmen it keeps away from church. So long as human nature lasts a certain hankering for what is unusual and exciting will go with it, and to some natures miracles will always appeal, though the appeal was probably stronger two thousand years ago. They have long been a commonplace in the lives of saints. Their influence in rousing interest, and above all in collecting money, is amply proved in the history of the Catholic Church. The wealth of the great shrines of Christendom, not least the treasures of Canterbury after the death of Becket, is a notorious example of piety directed by worldly wisdom. The temptation to exploit credulity for profit is one which few priests probably of any religion have resisted since the worship of mysteries began.

Our own day has shown an increasing interest in new cults and old superstitions, in occult and mystical beliefs. Even men of science have lent support to experiments and practices which imply an excess of faith. The emotions and tragedies of the last war strengthened the demand for spiritual consolations, for comfort in sorrow, for some opportunity of communicating with the beloved and invisible dead. To such demands there will always be someone to respond. The vision of the angels of Mons, audaciously invented by a newspaper reporter, was accepted by multitudes as a revelation from above.

One curious result of this emotionalism, it may be worth recalling, has been a renewal of the strange enthusiasm for Thomas Becket, as a protagonist of the Church in opposition to the State, which cropped up in Hurrell Froude and his companions a hundred years ago. It is not long since a newly-consecrated Anglican Bishop told a congregation that he had had something very like a vision of Becket to inspire him. Yet worse inspiration a modern Bishop could hardly seek. For Becket's chief title to fame as an ecclesiastic is that he fought

fiercely for the privileges of his own profession, and in particular to prevent clerics accused of criminal offences from being made amenable to the ordinary law. Hagiography, unhappily, is not to be discouraged by inconvenient facts like these. A recent Catholic life of the Archbishop¹ tells us that "God began to work miracles through him as soon as he had received his glory," and that Becket's sanctity is "attested by miracles which it would be merely superstition to disbelieve." That is obviously not an argument intended for enquiring minds. But considerations of this kind need not prevent us from viewing with the reserve which modern scholarship suggests attempts to treat as literally accurate all the physical portents which the Gospel story associates with the life of Christ.

II

The doctrine of the Mass: diverse interpretations. The evidence for what passed at the Last Supper. The words attributed to St. Paul: the narratives of the Synoptists: and the widely different account in the Fourth Gospel. Language of the Acts, of Justin Martyr, and of the *Didache*. Pagan ideas of sacrifice and of communion with the Deity. Mystic and materialistic theories. Berengar's revolt and submission. Views of Bishop Gore, of the Schoolmen, and of English Reformers. John Hales and the Protestant position. What is the message of the Eucharist for us today?

A more detailed examination is needed in considering the reports of the great outstanding miracles attending on the Saviour's birth and death which have been definitely embodied in our Creeds. But before examining the wording of the Creeds let us glance at the history of one solemn ceremony, which a great multitude of worshippers have for centuries regarded as the most sacred observance of the Catholic Church. For generation after generation the doctrine of the Mass, gradually and rather doubtfully formulated in the earliest Christian ages, held its own. Theologians struggled to reconcile materialistic

¹ By R. Speaight (1938).

and spiritual interpretations of it. The Fathers themselves spoke of it at times in curious and hesitating language. Schoolmen laboured to read into the difficult doctrine an infinite variety of shades of meaning. But in the Reformation of the sixteenth century the Roman Mass was definitely rejected by the Church of England as embodying a false conception of our faith: on that point the wording of the Thirty-Nine Articles cannot be explained away. And there was then substituted for it in this country a ceremony which most Englishmen¹ regarded as something essentially different, but which noted theologians ever since the sixteenth century have contended was something essentially the same.

It will be obvious that a short treatise of this nature cannot examine in great detail the subtleties of doctrine raised. Ample opportunity to study them is afforded by the two learned and massive volumes in which Dr. Darwell Stone, an accepted spokesman of the Anglo-Catholic party, has set them out.² But for most of us it is more immediately important to ask what do we know with anything like accuracy of the circumstances of the Last Supper, of the words which Jesus used on that occasion, and of the meaning which He intended them to bear? Was it, as asserted later, the institution of a solemn ecclesiastical rite for the Church which had not yet been formed? Or was it an appeal made to His disciples in an hour of tense anxiety and peril to remember His teaching and Himself?

Consider the authorities first. There are four passages in the Gospels which bear directly on the story, though they differ, as so often, in details. But the famous verses in the First Epistle to the Corinthians are supposed to give the earliest account of the incident that we possess. In chapter x of that Epistle the author had already referred to it (verses 16 and 17):—

“The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?”

¹ “Most” may possibly be an over-statement as applied to the England of 1536. But it would undoubtedly be true of the England of 1600.

² See his *History of the Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*. There is, of course, a great literature on the subject, in which one may perhaps single out Dr. Gore's *Dissertations* and his volume on *The Body of Christ*.

For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread ”

And in chapter xi he explains his reference thus (verses 23-25) :

“For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread :

And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me.

After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood; this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me.”

The words “I have received of the Lord” must, if rightly attributed to St. Paul, be a rhetorical statement. For there is no reason to suppose that Paul ever saw Jesus, and his account can only be given at second hand. It is not credible that such details could have been vouchsafed to him in a vision like the famous vision on the Damascus road. It seems far more probable that the words were never used by Paul, but were introduced into the Epistle later by a reviser, who tried to give authority to them by stating that the Apostle had received them from the Lord. The First Epistle to the Corinthians was one of a series of letters written by Paul, into which notes or additions seem to have been introduced on points of doctrine as the practice of the Church developed, and as an official tradition on the subject was adopted in the Gospels and elsewhere. If the *Didache* may be relied on, the doctrine of the Mass could not have developed during Paul’s lifetime to the extent which is represented in the words attributed to him here.

The narratives in the four Gospels must also be based upon hearsay; none of the writers were present at the meal. The three Synoptic accounts are in substance very much alike though they contain some noteworthy variations. Mark’s, the earliest, runs thus (chap. xiv. 22-25) :

“And as they did eat, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and brake it, and gave to them, and said, Take, eat; this is my body.

And he took the cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them: and they all drank of it.

And he said unto them, This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many.

Verily I say unto you, I will drink no more of the fruit of the vine, until that day that I drink it new in the kingdom of God."

Matthew follows Mark closely (chap. xxvi. 26-29):

"And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body.

And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it,

For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.

But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's Kingdom."

Luke, as usual, elaborates more (chap. xxii. 15-20):

"And he said unto them, With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer:

For I say unto you, I will not any more eat hereof, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God.

And he took the cup and gave thanks, and said, Take this, and divide it among yourselves.

For I say unto you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come.

And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me.

Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you."¹

It seems clear that additions were beginning to creep in. Jesus here desires to eat the passover with His disciples, and

¹ Professor Guignebert (*Jesus*, Eng. Tr. p. 436) reminds us that the text of Luke here quoted follows the four great MSS. Aleph, A, B and C. But some important MSS. break off after the words "This is my body" in verse 19, and omit substantially the injunction to repeat the rite, the mention of the second cup, and the "testament in my blood." It is a mistake, when MSS. differ, to build too confidently on the authenticity of particular words.

He bids them share the bread and the cup in remembrance of Him. This injunction to repeat the rite in memory of Jesus is not found in Mark or in Matthew or in the shorter text of Luke, which may be earlier than the longer text we have. It corresponds on the other hand with the statement in Corinthians. Were the memorable words, one wonders, due to a reviser who wished to bring the text attributed to Luke into correspondence with the text attributed to Paul? That question cannot be easily dismissed. The points of resemblance of the three accounts are in other respects close. Only it is noticeable that Luke's introduction of the words "before I suffer" imply that Jesus had already told His disciples of His approaching death: and it is difficult to reconcile that suggestion with the startled panic which they showed when His arrest and Crucifixion took place.

Still the Synoptic accounts of the Last Supper generally confirm each other strongly. And that renders all the more remarkable the wide divergence which the Fourth Gospel shows. In John's account (chap. xiii) no such scene takes place. The Supper is immediately followed by the washing of the disciples' feet, and the all-important words, which are thought to have instituted the Eucharist, are transferred to an earlier chapter (chap. vi), and connected with the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand. In the discourse which follows there later Jesus proclaims Himself the bread of life.

"I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."

And to the murmuring, questioning Jews He answers:

"Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you.

Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day."

It is a strange and significant variation. The manna, bread from heaven, given to the Israelites in the wilderness, is compared with the bread of life from heaven given by the Father

in the person of His son. There seems to be, if one may venture to say so, some confusion in both the words and the ideas. The rather repellent language about eating the flesh and drinking the blood of the Son of man seems to be grafted unnaturally on to the old story of the manna given in the wilderness. But there is no institution of any ecclesiastical rite for the Church. John the Evangelist could hardly have been unaware of the story told in the Synoptic Gospels. Yet he deliberately rejects it and transfers the solemn words put there into the mouth of Jesus to a wholly different scene. Professor Burkitt goes so far as to call this "a deliberate sacrifice of historical truth." Once again one is led to wonder whether editors or revisers may not have been at work.¹

Three other references to the subject should be mentioned here. The Acts tell us (chap. ii. 42 and 46) that the Jews converted at Pentecost by the preaching of Peter "continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers"; the breaking of bread "from house to house" was clearly a fraternal meal. Here again there is no suggestion of any new rite; there is no special reference to Jesus; and nothing is said about His flesh and blood. Then Justin Martyr has an interesting passage, about the middle of the second century, which is in line with the Pauline tradition, though we know nothing of the source from which it comes.

"The Apostles, in the memoirs which have been handed down from them and which are called Gospels, relate that they received this from him; he took bread and, having given thanks, he said to them: Do this in remembrance of me; this is my body. And having taken the cup likewise and given thanks, he said: This is my blood. And he gave (it) to them only."

And, thirdly, the *Didache* or Teaching of the Twelve Apostles describes the meals shared in common by the first Christian groups—a custom not unknown to the Jews—and the prayers

¹ The references here to eating the flesh and drinking the blood of the Saviour, omitted in the Evangelist's account of the Last Supper, and introduced as an addition to the discourse upon the bread from heaven, raise a strong suspicion of interpolation. It is very difficult to accept them as an authentic utterance of our Lord.

and thanksgivings which went with them. The root idea of these gatherings was the breaking of bread in fellowship and brotherly communion. It was a social meal, and it was accompanied by the giving of thanks to God the giver of all good things. There was at first no mystic significance about it. But after the death of Jesus it inevitably recalled the last supper which He had shared with His disciples. And gradually, as His followers set themselves to build up a mystical theology round the story of His Death and Passion, new and solemn and even semi-pagan associations became associated with that simple scene.

There is no doubt that the idea of communion with the Deity through feeding on him, and thus securing new life or immortality, entered into pagan and primitive religions. Among Semitic races, we are told on high authority, the fundamental idea of sacrifice was communion between the God and his worshippers by joint participation in the living flesh and blood of a sacred victim. But there is no sufficient ground for thinking that St. Paul applied these ideas to the Lord's Supper. His language is not always easy to interpret, but he never speaks explicitly of eating the flesh or drinking the blood of the Saviour. It was not in any gross ritual or in any form of magic but in whole-hearted faith that Paul sought communion with Christ.¹ Nevertheless, it is evident that the simple ceremony, the common meal referred to in the *Didache*, came in time to be overlaid with more elaborate and mystical ideas. The theory of a sacrificial communion grew up. The idea that Christ was in some way present in the bread and wine was adopted. Liturgical conceptions gathered round it. The miraculous character of the ceremony developed, and the priestly claims associated with it gained thereby in strength.

Dr. Gore's writings on the subject and Dr. Darwell Stone's history of the Eucharistic doctrine may be taken as representing most adequately the Anglo-Catholic view. Dr. Gore endeavoured to elaborate the doctrine in its "truest and completest form." He definitely rejected the formula to which Berengar in the eleventh century submitted as "a gross and

¹ See Kennedy's *Paul and the Mystery Religions*, p. 277

horrible doctrine"; but he believed that no deep cleavage existed between the least Protestant types of Anglican teaching and the most moderate types of Roman teaching on the subject. For him the spiritual nourishment given in the sacrament imparted "in some real sense" the flesh and blood of Christ. He quoted from the second century Justin Martyr's authority for this. The bread and wine when consecrated became something higher and diviner, but exactly what it was difficult to say. The strange words signified that there was somehow an inflowing of Christ's manhood into ours. Eating His flesh meant "receiving into ourselves the spiritual presence of His manhood." Drinking His blood meant "receiving and absorbing His human but God-united life." If that be so, it still remains an unfortunate, even a revolting method of expression. But what warrant is there for suggesting that Jesus ever entertained this idea?

What is so noticeable, if one may respectfully say so, in Bishop Gore's treatment of the problem, as noticeable as his deep sincerity, is the indefiniteness of the phrases he employs. The spiritual nourishment imparted, he tells us, is "in some real sense" the flesh and blood of Christ. The divine life is in "some mystical sense" partaken of. Christ is present according to Catholic belief "in some special sense" in the whole Eucharistic service. Christ's manhood must "in some sense" be meant by the flesh and blood. But what that sense is is never sufficiently explained, because these phrases really baffle explanation, and convey nothing clear or definite to those who merely accept them on the authority of the Church. All through the ages, and even to-day, one sees high-minded theologians groping for a meaning in phrases which earlier theologians invented, possibly to escape from the difficulties of their problems and to deepen the mystery of their faith.

Dr. Gore was not unnaturally afraid that some might find "a lack of definiteness" in his account of the real presence. But the defence which he offers for this vagueness could hardly, one feels, have been satisfactory to his own mind.

"There is a kind of clearness of statement which suits material objects but which simply does not apply to spiritual things,

and it is plain that such clearness is, both in the Bible and in the fathers, avoided as a danger."

That some early Fathers and some New Testament redactors at times avoided the danger of lucidity is not to be denied. But can it be wise to allege with Dr. Gore that "the craving (for lucidity) must only be gratified with great reserves," and to found the defence of orthodox traditions on the plea that to be lacking in clearness is almost a necessity of faith?

Bishop Gore and Dr. Darwell Stone have left us a great collection of theological opinions from the earliest ages on the mystery of the Mass. What is the miracle which the priest works? What is the nature of the bread and wine after consecration? In what way can Christ in any realizable sense be supposed to be present in them? The answers given in the course of eighteen centuries to these perplexing questions are as infinitely various as we might expect. Early theologians and even early Fathers sometimes used baffling language on the subject; their agreement was by no means complete. At Alexandria there was at one time a tendency to explain the Eucharist as not much more than an occasion for mystical contemplation. Clement, however, declared that "the flesh and blood of the Word" were "the comprehension of the divine power and essence." Justin, Irenaeus, Origen believed that the bread and wine became by consecration the body and blood of the Saviour. Cyril of Jerusalem and Chrysostom went further. Chrysostom spoke of the priest "continuously manipulating the common Lord of all," Cyril of the communicant "receiving the King in his right hand." Gregory of Nyassa suggested that the bread and wine were, by a process analogous to digestion, converted into the substance of His glorified body, in order that we might partake of it for the nourishment within us of a physical principle of immortality. Augustine's views were to some extent uncertain. But on the whole he clung to the belief that the bread and wine were symbols, and his influence long held opposing tendencies in check. In the eleventh century, however, a dark and brutal age of superstition, the grosser conception of the mystery prevailed, and the famous episode of Berengar's challenge and submission

ended in the triumph of materialism and the degradation of the Catholic creed.

Berengar believed that Transubstantiation was contrary to reason, and had dared to plead for reason as the criterion in matters of faith. But he was finally compelled to sign a sweeping retraction and to declare his belief in terms which the authorities prescribed :

"The bread and wine which are placed upon the altar are after consecration not only a sacrament but the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, and sensibly (*sensualiter*), not only in a sacrament but in reality, are handled by the hands of priests and broken and bruised by the teeth of the faithful."

The worshippers eat the actual body of Christ. His blood is drunk "with the mouth of the body as well as the mouth of the heart." The endeavours made for so many centuries to place upon the miracle some kind of spiritual interpretation have given way to a theory which acknowledged it to be little more than a barbaric rite. The advocates of Transubstantiation could at least say what they meant. But Dr. Gore has admitted that the atmosphere in which this doctrine grew into a dogma was "calculated to send a shiver through one's intellectual and moral being."

Can we persuade ourselves that Jesus, in His last supper with His disciples, ever in word or thought intended to institute a rite so unlovely and unnatural as that?

As time went on Christendom revolted against this materialistic doctrine. Thomas Aquinas and many of the schoolmen laboured to find a way of escape, to suggest spiritual interpretations and refinements which orthodox theologians could accept. But with the multitude the plainer and grosser tradition prevailed. Tradition, unexplainable and unchangeable tradition, has always been the strongest bulwark of the Roman Church. "I am tradition," said Pius IX, the Pope whose infallibility the Vatican Council as lately as 1870 triumphantly proclaimed. The mediæval schoolmen for the most part gave up the struggle against authority. Faith must be accepted blindly as a mystery; dogmas of theology lay beyond the

region of proof. The most intrepid critics among them, men of the temper of William of Ockham, turned to philosophy for freedom and relief. Transubstantiation, if impossible to grasp by human reason, was on that account all the more a proof of the onnipotence of God. William of Ockham could accept it with mild irony as made "clear to the Church by some revelation, I suppose." Wycliffe attacked the doctrine, and his views were officially declared to be heresy; but his candour was not always quite lucid or consistent. In the end he abandoned the theory that the priest could change the substance of the elements, could in fact "make the body of Christ." The Lollards spoke more plainly in 1395:

"The feigned miracle of the Sacrament of bread leads all men but a few into idolatry; for they think that the body of Christ, which is never out of heaven, is by the power of the words of the priests in its essential being enclosed in a small piece of bread, which they show to the people."

The sixteenth century Reformers were not all so definite upon the subject as some ardent spirits of their day desired. Luther did not prohibit the doctrine of Transubstantiation; it might be held, but must not be imposed. But the Lutheran theory of Consubstantiation—that the substance of the bread and the substance of the Lord's Body were both together in the consecrated element—overcame one of the difficulties raised by the Lollards by postulating the ubiquity of the ascended Christ. Calvin agreed that Christ was the bread of life; the difficulty was to decide how we partook of Him. He also left the question a mystery to be apprehended by faith. The Heidelberg Catechism of 1563 more boldly declared that the bread and wine were tokens. It was "an accursed idolatry" to hold that Christ was bodily there to be worshipped. Cranmer, essentially a moderate-minded Englishman, moved more slowly. In the end he denied Transubstantiation altogether, both carnally and spiritually. But he allowed that Christ might be present in the Sacrament, although man's reason could not comprehend how and after what manner He was there. Hooker was dignified but guarded. Lancelot Andrewes,

the very star of preachers, an Anglican Bishop whom Milton mourned and Elizabeth and James I delighted to honour, told Cardinal Bellarmine:

"We believe no less than you that the presence is real. Concerning the method of the presence we define nothing rashly, and, I add, we do not anxiously enquire."

But the "ever memorable" John Hales, "one of the clearest heads and best prepared breasts in Christendom," summed up probably the average Englishman's position. His learning, tolerance and humour lent weight to his opinions. And his outspokenness did not prevent his becoming chaplain to Archbishop Laud. Hales could not agree that any miracle was wrought by the priest in the Sacrament, or that at the words of consecration anything mysterious happened. To say that the consecrated bread and wine were the body of Christ not after a carnal but after a spiritual manner, seemed to him to have no meaning, whether it were said by the Reformers or by the divines of Rome. Conceits and fond practices, based on "conjecture weakly founded," had crept into church custom.

"Jesus Christ is eaten at the communion table in no sense, neither spiritually by virtue of anything done there, nor really; neither metaphorically, nor literally."

In the communion nothing was given but bread and wine. The bread and wine were signs indeed "of somewhat given long since, even of Christ given for us upon the cross, sixteen hundred years ago and more." In the sacrament we commemorated His death and passion, and testified our union with Him and our communion one with another.

Popular opinion in this country, often ignorant and impatient of perplexities, and far less instructed than some ecclesiastics who seem to regard Church authority and Church tradition as the paramount objects of religion, may at times be bolder in facing broad issues than professional theologians can allow themselves to be. It has never since the Reformation tolerated the idea of a priestly miracle of any kind in the Mass. The rough simplicity which led Englishmen in the sixteenth century to coin irreverently the slang phrase *hocus-pocus*, has

stamped on history their conviction that the alleged miracle was little better than a conjuror's device. The conclusions which they came to then still stand. We are as far as ever to-day from solving the problem. Thousands of pages have been written, thousands of speculations, subtleties, sophistications put forward, to explain it, for nearly now two thousand years. But the questioners remain unsatisfied and the mystery unexplained. English thought upon the subject has never advanced beyond the words of Bishop Andrewes. "We define nothing rashly . . . we do not anxiously enquire."

Whether Jesus ever used the words on which the Catholic Church built up the solemn ceremony must in fact always be uncertain. There is not and there never can be any first-hand evidence that He did. He was at the time, so far as we can judge, ardently expecting the coming of the new Kingdom, which from the first His mission had proclaimed. His thoughts and hopes were concentrated upon that. Beyond the tribulations impending He saw it already approaching near. Is it probable that in these circumstances He should in that last simple gathering have deliberately chosen to institute a mysterious ritual for a Church which was not yet founded, and whose perpetuation He could not have expected or indeed desired? Ought we in the circumstances to put aside Professor Guignebert's warning: "it is to Paul, not to Jesus, and not to any historical tradition, that the significance attributed to the Eucharistic sacrifice is due?" Ought we to forget that the Church which created the tradition, and which discovered so strange a significance in the story of the Master breaking bread with His disciples, has never in her better mind been altogether happy about her failure to interpret clearly the mystery which she had evolved? What a relief and refreshment it would be to many to leave behind them these baffling speculations, to abandon the supernaturalism associated with them, and to content themselves with treasuring a simpler and more credible memorial of Christ! For some who try to think upon the Gospel story it is almost inconceivable that the last message of Jesus to His loved disciples could have been "Eat my flesh and drink my blood," in any sense at all. For them the Euchar-

istic message takes another form: "*This do*—share this broken bread, this cup of wine with Me, as tokens, not of a barbarous and idolatrous ritual, but as sharing My spirit, My teaching, My example—*this do in remembrance of Me.*"

III

Are dogmas a help or a hindrance to religion? Should formulas unchanged for centuries prevent the development of thought? Our three great Creeds: their origins. The influence of Athanasius. Decisions on doctrine by the early Councils of the Church

How far is it true, as some affirm, that ecclesiastical dogmas are the strength and essence of religion; how far that they are, as others judge, its weakness and its bane? And how many of those laymen who regularly recite the ancient formulas from habit have ever examined the circumstances which led to their acceptance as beliefs?

One of the chief characteristics of the Oxford Movement was the devotion of its leaders to primitive dogmas and traditions, and that characteristic still largely dominates their successors in the Church. Yet three hundred years before the Tractarians flung down their challenge to the Reformation, Erasmus, who did not apparently share Luther's opinion that there was something demoralizing in the office of a Bishop, was writing to an Archbishop of his day:

"Reduce the dogmas necessary to be believed to the smallest possible number. You can do it without danger to the realities of Christianity."

And few perhaps would now deny that to reduce the number of the dogmas affirmed by our Creeds, and to eliminate some of them altogether, might give a new meaning to our services and greatly strengthen the position of the Church. Century after century has passed since the Creeds were formulated and accepted. They had to face many an objection, variation and correction before they became stereotyped in the forms we know. But once stereotyped they have been proof against any

process of expansion or amendment. Of all the vast changes which the centuries have brought with them in our knowledge of Scripture, of history, of philosophy and science, not a trace is to be found in these unchangeable relics of the past. Their clauses, however difficult of interpretation, still stand unmodified and unexplained. And every clause, however precise and positive in expression, must, as the authors of the recent *Doctrinal Report* remind us, be in a sense regarded as symbolic. It is not the purpose of credal statements, we are told, to affirm historical facts or metaphysical statements as such. Statements of supposed facts which did not actually happen may yet claim at times to be called symbolically true.

Yet it is not always an easy or satisfactory process to distinguish between symbolical and factual truths.

There are three familiar Creeds in the Church of England, "*Nicene* Creed, *Athanasius's* Creed, and that which is commonly called the "*Apostles'* Creed," which the Articles tell us "ought thoroughly to be received and believed." The one which wrongly bears the name of Athanasius may have been composed in the fifth century and have become known in the two centuries which followed. It is the most complete and positive affirmation, under the gravest penalties, of its own metaphysical conceptions of the Trinity and the Incarnation. The classical formula of the doctrine of the Incarnation, proclaimed by the Council of Chalcedon in 451, is quoted in the *Doctrinal Report*.¹ The main upshot of this formula, the Report tells us, is plainly the affirmation of real and absolute Deity, and of real and absolute Humanity, in the one Christ. But "how the affirmation is to be explained, or how the divine and human elements are to be related," the formula does not declare.

"We believe ourselves," the Commissioners add, "to be affirming in our Report that which was affirmed in the language of its own time by the Council at Chalcedon. But we wish to assert that the Church is in no way bound to the metaphysic or the psychology which lie behind the terms employed by the Council "

¹ See pp. 80-81.

This famous Creed has now widely ceased to be recited in our churches. It would be rash to assume that it has ever been widely understood.

The Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed have an even longer history. Indeed the beginnings of all our Creeds go back to very early times. There can be little doubt that they arose from the natural desire of Christians to affirm and teach to candidates for baptism the fundamental truths of salvation. This counted for more even than the desire of triumphant orthodoxy to proscribe heretical beliefs. Very soon a number of formulas, some brief and simple, others longer and more elaborate, took shape. The ceremonial and ritualistic aspects of the new religion steadily developed as the early centuries went on. Our so-called Apostles' Creed with its Latin associations may claim descent from the oldest creed of the Roman Church, which was known before the third century came to an end. The Nicene Creed, which had its origin in Eastern and Hellenic thought, was adopted in the first Catholic Council of Nicaea in 325. It was framed to condemn the heresy of Arius, who was thought to have questioned the divinity of Christ. Athanasius took a principal part in deciding the phrasing of the Creed, and the Arians, said Hooker, never suffered him thereafter to enjoy "the comfort of a peaceable day." We repeat it in our Communion Service still.

The life of Athanasius, which covers so much of the fourth century, is perhaps the best illustration of the occupations, triumphs, vicissitudes and perils of a great ecclesiastic's life in the difficult days when the Creeds were being made. We may wonder that a man of such rare powers and high ambitions, a great divine, a great moral reformer, and so fearless and tireless a controversialist as to have been five times driven into exile for the sake of his beliefs, should have chosen to spend his best years in fighting over phrases to define the divinity and humanity of Christ. The battle whether the Second Person of the Trinity, when set beside the First, should be described as *homo-ousios* or *homoio-ousios*, or *anomoios*, or *homoios* alone, may seem now curiously futile. But for Athanasius it involved a vital issue, the question whether the Son of God was or was

not co-equal and co-eternal with the Father, and struck at the root of the doctrine of the Trinity, for which in its fulness he would willingly have died. The phrase in the Nicene Creed which we repeat so often, "Being of one substance with the Father," keeps alive the memory of these grave controversies still.

The Catholic Councils held in early ages, from the famous Council of Nicaea in 325 to the Second Council of Constantinople in 680, brought together the Bishops and rulers of the Universal Church, before East and West began to differ too seriously in opinion to secure unanimity any longer over doctrines in debate. Any Creed approved by these six Councils is regarded in some quarters as fixed beyond the possibility of change. Those present were supernaturally guided by the Holy Ghost, and their decisions could not be challenged or denied. The same authority and universality cannot be claimed by other Councils since acknowledged by the Roman Church. But even in the earliest days the Councils were not free from human frailties, and their polemical assertions on questions of theology were not always obviously inspired. A fourth-century Father who presided at one of these Councils wrote frankly to the Prefect of Constantinople:

"My own inclination is to avoid all assemblies of bishops, for I have never seen any Council come to a good end."

And another great ecclesiastic of the same era declared with equal candour:

"Since Nicaea we have done nothing but compose creeds. Every year we make new creeds and define invisible mysteries. . . . Tearing one another to pieces, we have been the cause of one another's ruin."

Why should we, fifteen or sixteen centuries later, profess a respect for theological phrases and discussions, which the theologians who made the phrases and took part in the discussions by no means invariably shared? Can we find much in the doctrines they adopted to remind us of the teaching and spirit of Jesus? Is it reasonable that we should continue to treat as inspired, unalterable, sacred, every dogma adopted by

contending theologians, often under orders from contending Emperors in themselves little worthy of esteem?

But let us leave these general questions, though they are significant and worth consideration, and examine a few of the familiar statements which still figure prominently in our creeds. Take four points, all important but not all of the same importance, on which we recite our beliefs so often in the brief phrases of the Apostles' Creed, namely, the four doctrines of (1) The Trinity, (2) the Virgin Birth of Jesus, (3) His Descent into Hell after or during the Crucifixion, and (4) His Resurrection, carrying with it, apparently, the doctrine of the resurrection of the body for us all. Those four points, if we may venture to discuss them freely—and if we are honest in our search for truth we must—sufficiently indicate how grave, mysterious and difficult are the problems which confront us when we explore the making of the Creeds. The first of our Articles of Religion treats "Of Faith in the Holy Trinity," the second "Of the Word or Son of God, which was made very Man," the fifth "Of the Holy Ghost"; and the first Article may be quoted here:

"There is but one living and true God, everlasting, without body, parts, or passions; of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness; the Maker, and Preserver of all things both visible and invisible. And in unity of this Godhead there be three Persons, of one substance, power, and eternity; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost."

The most startling thing about these phrases is the strange assumption they convey that their authors possessed accurate knowledge in regard to wholly unknown things.

IV

The doctrine of the Trinity. The language of Augustine. The Three Persons: Tertullian's phrase. Comments by Erasmus. Appeals to superstition and to freedom. Guarded language of the *Doctrinal Report*

The Doctrine of the Trinity is of course most fully treated in the Athanasian Creed. But it is needless to dwell in detail here

on those rhythmical, bewildering, sonorous clauses. It is not possible to understand how they came to be framed without studying the controversies behind them and the desire of those who adopted them to hit some persistent heresies upon the head. Whether this creed was composed by Vigilius Tapsensis or Venantius Fortunatus or St. Hilary of Arles or St. Vincent of Lerins, or by St. Ambrose or any other of the possible authors suggested, is of less importance than the fact that its phrases have so much in common with the writings of St. Augustine. Few of the great Fathers of antiquity were better able than that illustrious Bishop and divine to wrap up their meaning in language puzzling to others if not to themselves. Augustine had gifts of expression in which he was not easily excelled, and he applied them in a deeply devotional spirit to the strange medley of theology and metaphysics from which the churchmen of the early ages organized the Creeds.

“Come to my help,” he cries in his *Soliloquies*, “thou one God, one true eternal substance, where is no discrepancy, no confusion, no transience, no indigency, no death ”

And again, in a passage of the *Soliloquies* printed with his works:¹

“Holy Trinity, superadmirable Trinity, and superinerrable, and superinscrutable, and superinaccessible, superincomprehensible, superintelligible, superessential, superessentially surpassing all sense, all reason, all intellect, all intelligence, all essence of supercelestial minds; which can neither be said nor thought, nor understood, nor known even by the eyes of angels.”

“Superessentially surpassing all sense”! It would be possible to apply the description to this passage. It may be unfair to apply it to Augustine. But it would not be unfair to apply it to the confused philosophy and the dithyrambic phrases with which many a zealous doctor in that primitive era tried to do honour to the mysteries of his faith. Can we persuade our-

¹ Probably later than Augustine but inspired by him (See M. Arnold, *Literature and Dogma*, 150-152)

selves that dogmas framed in language of this nature will help our younger generations towards a knowledge of God?

It would not profit us to ask to-day how many churchmen find meaning and comfort in the doctrine which the first of the Thirty-Nine Articles lays down. In early times the doctrine of the Trinity caused many searchings of heart before it was finally agreed. There was a possibility that the Son, the *Logos*, might come to be regarded as a secondary God. Athanasius stopped this by securing the recognition of the Son as of the substance of the Father, as fully and completely God. Tertullian caused anxiety by introducing the dangerous term "Persons"; exactly what he meant by it few people perhaps completely understood. It had to be made plain that the three Persons were of one substance in the Godhead, that the *Logos* was not a separate mind, but a distinguishable activity of the one and only Mind of God. The Son was the Wisdom of God, the Father was His Power, and the Holy Ghost His Love. Over such distinctions of thought and phraseology countless words and hours and prayers and tears perhaps were spent. One does not wonder that a man of intrepid mind and purpose like Erasmus broke out in indignation against the unending sophistications which still in his day, a thousand years later, enveloped and obscured the realities of religion.

"The schoolmen have been arguing for generations whether the proposition that Christ exists from eternity is correctly stated; whether He is compounded of two natures or consists of two natures; whether He is *conflatus*, or *commixtus*, or *conglutinated*, or *co-augmentatus*, or *geminatus*, or *copulatus*. The present opinion is that none of these participles are right, and we are to have a new word, *unitus*, which still is to explain nothing. If they are asked if the human nature is united to the Divine, they say it is a pious opinion. If asked whether the Divine Nature is united to the human, they hesitate and will not affirm. And all this stuff, of which we know nothing, and are not required to know anything, they treat as the citadel of our faith.

Is no man to be admitted to grace who does not know how the Father differs from the Son, and both from the Spirit, or how the nativity of the Son differs from the procession of the Spirit? A man is not damned because he cannot tell whether

the Spirit has one principle or two. Has he the fruits of the Spirit? That is the question. Is he patient, kind, good, gentle, modest, temperate, chaste?"

Can those who seek a live religion in the twentieth century, be content, for want of courage on these questions, to accept as authoritative the mediaeval jargon from which Erasmus laboured to deliver us four centuries ago? And can we wonder if even in the Roman Church Modernist voices are asking: "Who have taught us that the consensus of theologians cannot err, but the theologians themselves? Mortal, fallible, ignorant men like ourselves!"

We see two powerful forces pulling different ways. There is Newman's appeal for an England vastly more superstitious, inherited by his Anglo-Catholic successors, and clung to still with passionate sincerity by many devoted members of our Church. And there is the appeal of Erasmus to men of mind and thoughtfulness to free themselves from these dreary speculations, this deadening burden of ecclesiastical traditions wrapped like grave-clothes round the gospel of Jesus, and to refuse to treat all the dogmas built upon them as the centre and citadel of the Christian faith. Between these two contending forces the Church of England stands, and the recent *Doctrinal Report* speaks for her. But on this baffling subject she appears to speak in rather doubtful tones. The belief in the Trinity, the Report tells us, originated, "at first hardly consciously," not in speculation but in Christian experience—a statement a little difficult to understand. The Christians, it is argued, had an experience which was threefold; first, the belief in one God, inherited from the Jews; secondly, an experience of the person of our Lord, both on earth and as risen from the dead; thirdly, an experience of the power of the Holy Spirit in their lives. But could there have been much real experience of the person or the mind of Jesus in the theologians who, generations later, composed the clauses of the Athanasian Creed, or poured out their reverent emotions in such strangely assorted epithets as Augustine's? The Report would seem to be on safer ground in adding that the doctrine, which it attributes to experience, "has proved capable of

meeting demands which arise in the sphere of metaphysical thought and has furnished a basis for those philosophic conceptions of the Divine Being which are most adequate to their theme." Whether this carefully guarded statement will convince perplexed enquirers of the meaning or value of the dogma only those enquirers can finally decide.

v

The doctrine of the Virgin Birth. Its unknown origin. Apocryphal legends about Mary and Joseph. The Birth Stories given by Matthew and Luke: the genealogies of Davidic descent. Where did these stories come from? Why were they ignored by Mark and John, by St. Paul and St. Peter, and by other authorities?

Of all the supernatural incidents woven into the Scripture story, by zealous and uncritical enthusiasts seeking to glorify their Master after His death, none is more startling or difficult to credit than the assertion that He was born of a Virgin Mother by the intervention of the Holy Ghost. Similar marvels are, no doubt, in other cases associated with the births of deities and founders of religions, and it is not surprising to find this idea among the numerous myths which gathered round the personality of Christ. Such myths are obviously products of imagination and can be founded on no evidence except assertion. But the temptation in the case of alleged occurrences which defy explanation to use the word "evidence" in some symbolical and quite unhistorical sense is one to which enthusiasts, and even theologians, have at times too easily succumbed.

The date and origin of this strange story about the birth of Jesus are unknown. It is told in great detail among the legends which are so plentiful in the apocryphal Gospels, and at some time and by some means it found its way into two of the Canonical Gospels, though conspicuously absent from the other two. The fullest version probably is that set out in the apocryphal *Protevangelium* or Book of James, which may date from the second century and was known to Origen in the third.

This gives in picturesque detail an account of Mary's early years, beginning with the announcement of her birth by an angel to Anna as she sat sadly watching the sparrows in their nest, and the subsequent fulfilment of Anna's longing for a child. Mary was born and soon waxed strong. When she was six months old she walked seven steps. At three she was presented to the priest in the Temple, and made to sit on the third step of the altar.

"And the Lord put grace upon her, and she danced with her feet, and all the house of Israel loved her."

From three to twelve she was nurtured as a dove in the Temple and received food from the hand of an angel. At twelve the priests consulted about her future, and an angel prompted the high priest to assemble "them that are widowers of the people"—an ingenious touch to prepare the way for the suggestion that Joseph already had a family by an earlier wife. When the heralds came out with their summons, Joseph, the widowed carpenter, "cast down his adze and ran to meet them." But he did not forget to take his rod with him, as the priestly proclamation had required. The high priest took the rods of all the widowers who responded to the summons, and prayed over them, and as Joseph received his rod back again, lo, a dove came forth from it and flew upon his head! What further sign could be desired?

At first Joseph, an old man already, declined to take a wife of twelve: but his objections were overcome. Mary went home and began to spin, and presently an angel announced her destiny to her.

"Fear not, Mary, for thou hast found grace before the Lord of all things, and thou shalt conceive of his word."

Mary, questioning and wondering, was answered:

"Not so, Mary, for a power of the Lord shall overshadow thee: wherefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of the Highest. And thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins."

There is much more. Angels intervene again. Joseph, startled

to find Mary expecting a child, is comforted. Both he and Mary are tested and proved to be sinless. He takes her to Bethlehem and finds a cave, where the child is born. The child is then hidden in a manger and the Magi visit Him there. But curiously enough there is no mention of any flight into Egypt. The suggestion all through is that James, Mary's presumed stepson, tells the story, and its authenticity may be judged from its details. We really know hardly anything of the early life of Mary, in spite of all the myths which gathered round her: indeed we know very little about her life at all. The Book of James was not, however, treated as a reliable authority. It was prohibited in the earliest papal Index as a heretical book.

What reason is there to treat the legend of the Virgin Birth embodied in this story as historical and worthy of belief? It is obvious that evidence in any true sense of such an occurrence cannot be had, though Dr. Gore has some surprising hypotheses upon that subject. The only justification for treating the story seriously is to be found in two well-known passages in the opening chapters of the First and Third Gospels, in regard to which many doubts exist. Matthew begins with a genealogy to show Joseph's descent from the house of David—which has no relevance to the Virgin Birth story except to suggest that our Lord was Joseph's son—and then relates very briefly how, in fulfilment of an ancient prophecy, Mary was found to be with child by the Holy Ghost. Luke tells the story with more fulness, and associates the remarkable birth of John the Baptist with the still more remarkable announcement of the destiny reserved for Mary's child. In Luke's version the two women, cousins, rejoice over their expectations together, and one of them bursts into the *Magnificat* which we know and love.¹ Luke's genealogy in his third chapter, tracing the descent of Jesus through Joseph, "as was supposed," up to David, Abraham and Adam, is of no more value than Matthew's, with which it disagrees.

Where did these stories come from, and when did they find their way into the Gospel texts? We do not know. Canon Streeter suggested that in Matthew's case the story may have

¹ There are some grounds for attributing it to Elizabeth.

been a local tradition of the Church at Antioch, and that Luke's account may have been translated from a Semitic language. He was decidedly of opinion that the *Magnificat* and the *Benedictus* were not originally written in Greek. It is significant that the theory of the Virgin Birth is not to be found in Mark's Gospel, nor, so far as we can judge, in any of the main sources on which Matthew and Luke relied. It is not to be found in any authentic document or tradition of the earliest date. It is not to be found in Paul's Epistles. It is not to be found in the earliest public preaching of the Gospel, if Peter's addresses are rightly recorded in the Acts. If Luke wrote the Acts, as has been generally supposed, and spoke of Jesus as the seed of David, it is strange that he has not a word to say there of the amazing story with which his Gospel begins. More significant still, the story of the Virgin Birth is not to be found in the Fourth Gospel which followed, where the Evangelist gives a wholly different account of the Incarnation and ignores Luke's account altogether. Could the belief have been accepted by the Church in the first century, if John the Evangelist deliberately passed it by? And is it not extraordinary that John and Paul and the writer to the Hebrews, three writers of genius second to none in interpreting the mission of Christ, should all alike pass over, if they ever heard of, the singular legend, which found its way at some date unknown to anyone into the opening pages of Matthew and of Luke?

The only one of the Apostolic Fathers who referred to and stressed the Virgin Birth allegation, was Ignatius, a very early Bishop of Antioch, whose writings are famous but whose life is obscure. Dr. Bethune-Baker has ventured the opinion that Ignatius regarded the story as "a kind of camouflage designed to deceive the Devil." The framers of the original Creed of Nicaea and the unknown author of the Athanasian Creed both, it seems, abstained from affirming it, though it must long before their time have taken its place among popular traditions. And in the Gospel narratives there are of course many references to Joseph and his family which contradict the idea, and which unmistakably imply Joseph's fatherhood of Jesus. The whole story of our Lord's descent from David presupposes and depends

on the paternity of Joseph. If that is abandoned the high claims of the genealogies disappear. Luke repeatedly speaks of Joseph and Mary as the parents of Jesus. Would he have done so if he had just written an elaborate passage to prove that Jesus was not Joseph's son? Luke tells us that Jesus was taken to Jerusalem by his "parents" for the passover, where they lost the child, and returning to seek Him found Him among the doctors in the Temple.

"Behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing,"

is Mary's gentle rebuke to her son. Are there any verifiable words attributed to Mary which imply that she affirmed or acquiesced in the story of the Virgin Birth? Is there any ground whatever for suggesting that it was countenanced by Jesus or enjoyed any credit while He was alive? Legends, no doubt, in those days sprang up quickly; but it is almost impossible to believe that the theory had found its way into popular acceptance when the First and Third Gospels were written. If it be admitted to be a later interpolation in both those Gospels, no grounds for treating it as authentic remain.

VI

Five distinct New Testament traditions refer to the birth of our Lord. Doubts about the Virgin Birth. Dr. Vincent Taylor's opinions. Bishop Gore's defence of the story; his remarkable hypotheses, and his unwillingness to surrender any tradition of the Catholic Church. The English Church now declines to insist upon the dogma or to accept the Mariolatry of Rome

The New Testament, it should not be forgotten, contains no less than five distinct traditions concerning our Lord's appearance in the world. First, there is the story in Mark's Gospel, which plunges at once into an account of His ministry, and only mentions incidentally that the carpenter from Nazareth had a mother and brothers and sisters, but looked to find little honour among His own kin. Secondly, there are the two remarkable Birth Narratives in the early chapters of Matthew

and Luke. Thirdly, there is the mystic theory of the Word made flesh, and identified in the first chapter of the Fourth Gospel with Jesus of Nazareth the son of Joseph. Fourthly, there is in the Epistle to the Hebrews the fine picture of the Son of God, who took on Him the seed of Abraham and became a great high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec: Melchisedec is described as without father, without mother, without descent. And fifthly, in *The Revelation*, among the visions of angels and elders surrounding the Lamb, there is a mysterious reference to "a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet," giving birth to a man-child who was to rule all nations, whom "the great red dragon" waited to devour, but who was immediately caught up to God and to His throne.¹ The truth is that ancient prophecies, new enthusiasms, legendary cults and mystical visions were called in to invest with a wonderful colouring what may in its origin have been only a simple tale. But among all the elements of fancy and of marvel which gathered round the newly-founded faith, that embodying the Virgin Birth of Jesus has as little claim as any to sanction or respect.

Still there are many writings on the subject, among which Dr. Gore's are conspicuous for their strong insistence on the dogma, and Dr. Vincent Taylor's for his evident unwillingness to throw over an ancient ecclesiastical tradition, which he cannot regard as proved.² Dr. Taylor's argument is candid and fair. The Birth Story in Matthew's Gospel suggests to him the conclusion that "apologetic and doctrinal interests are uppermost" there. He thinks that Matthew's account is not a later interpolation but is based on a story current when he wrote, and that the Evangelist wished to show us how Joseph's fears on the subject were allayed. He hesitates, not unnatur-

¹ Professor Burkitt's article on the Apocalypse in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (14th edition) is well worth consulting here.

² See Bishop Gore's *Dissertations* on subjects connected with the Incarnation, and Dr. Taylor's *Gospel Tradition* (152-163) and *Historical Evidence for the Virgin Birth*. A recent volume on *The Virgin Birth* by the Rev. Douglas Edwards contains some confident assertions; but in my judgment it wholly fails to prove that the theory was ever sanctioned by our Lord and His Apostles, or to explain by what means and at what date it came to be grafted on the Christian faith.

ally, to suggest that Matthew may have had the story from Joseph, but considers that his account was written from Joseph's point of view.

The Birth Stories in Luke's Gospel Dr. Taylor regards as "a kind of miniature Birth and Infancy drama," the scenes in which include the two Annunciation stories, the meeting of Mary and Elisabeth, and the two Birth Stories with the familiar incidents that follow. The Birth Stories here consist largely of songs and speeches, formed, it may be, on Old Testament models. The whole suggests to him a literary composition which should be treated as inspired poetry rather than as sober prose. Whether Luke or another writer is responsible for these stories, whether he could have introduced them into his original narrative or interpolated them at a later date, whether they are to be literally accepted or interpreted symbolically, Dr. Taylor finds it very difficult to decide. The literary critics say it is a question for the theologians; the theologians say it is a matter for historical enquiry. But neither argument disposes of the atmosphere of doubt which hangs over it all.

Dr. Taylor examines the whole question in painstaking detail. He finds himself at last forced to the conclusion that the Virgin Birth Story in the Third Gospel could not have been a part of Luke's original narrative, but must have been interpolated later, possibly by Luke himself. He is not able to prove—nobody ever has been—the source from which the Evangelists or their redactors drew their information; and with all his candour, if one may say so, he never seems quite to face what is the chief stumbling-block for enquirers, the abnormal quality of the whole tradition and the astonishing elements of supernaturalism which it contains. His patient examination thus works up to a rather indefinite conclusion. He will not assert the truth of the dogma, but only "its by no means inherent improbability."

"If the tradition is not historical, its ultimate origin must be sought in the overwhelming impression which Jesus left upon believing hearts and minds."

But why should the general impression left by Jesus produce a story so devoid of naturalness and proof?

"We have no ground for saying that a virgin birth is impossible; in the case of One so unique as Jesus Christ, such an assertion would be utterly absurd.

Whether it be historical or not, the Virgin Birth tradition must always be full of beauty and of truth."

But in what sense, one would respectfully ask, can an unhistorical, that is a false, tradition be described as full of truth?

Dr. Taylor will not consider the theory from the standpoint of science. For him "reasons of a dogmatic and religious order" turn the scale. He abandons historical considerations and enters the realm of doctrine. "The last word is with theology"—a conclusion to which plain laymen might demur. Is the doctrine of the Virgin Birth, he asks, essential to the doctrine of the Incarnation? Some eminent divines would not admit this. Dr. Taylor is not sure. It is a point on which he is waiting "for a yet fuller disclosure of the unfettered mind of the Church." How that unfettered mind is to be discovered he does not at the moment explain.

But if Dr. Taylor's considered opinion is doubtful, Bishop Gore's is decided and assured. On a point asserted by Church tradition he has no misgivings in regard to facts. He thinks that St. Paul may have referred to the Virgin Birth in his "first preaching" to the Corinthians; but without direct evidence this would be "foolish to maintain." No such evidence exists. On the other hand Paul asserted our Lord to be sinless, and this seems to Dr. Gore "to postulate the fact of His Virgin Birth." The Bishop starts by assuming "the substantial historical truth" of the Gospel narratives, which eases his task. He finds it "quite impossible to believe" that the Evangelist John was ignorant of the Virgin Birth—though he pointedly abstained from referring to it. He calls the story "a mystery of loud proclamation in the Church," but he does not tell us when or by whom it was first proclaimed. He finds "no difficulty at all in perceiving from what source originally it could have been derived and from what epoch its information could date." Joseph and Mary "*must* have been silent originally" as

to the conditions of the birth of Jesus, but in the years following the Crucifixion systematic enquiry into the circumstances must have been made. There is nothing improbable in the hypothesis that the brothers—Dr. Gore, with no evidence to rest on, prefers to regard them as the step-brothers—of Jesus were not originally admitted to the secret. Luke's account comes from "a recorder of proved trustworthiness"—Luke is in fact conspicuous as a writer for his embroideries and for the liberties he takes with other texts—and Luke's account "may well be Mary's account," indeed it "must be Mary's in origin, if it is genuine." So easily, when theological miracles are in question, is evidence assumed. Any difficulties found by scholars in Luke's mistakes or Luke's chronology are simply "exaggerated scepticism." The Evangelist makes a point of telling us that he has "traced the course of all things accurately from the first," and what better evidence can we ask for than such a man's testimony to himself?

"There is no evidence," Dr. Gore goes on, "to show the *imagination* of any early Christian capable of producing such an account"—a really astonishing argument—"for its consummate fitness, reserve, sobriety and loftiness are unquestionable. Is there any good reason against accepting it?"

Why ask for evidence when conjectures are so sure?

"We are justified in assuming that the account in these chapters is derived from no other person than the Virgin Mother herself."

To make assurance doubly sure, Dr. Gore also assumed that Matthew's narrative "bears upon it undesigned but evident traces of coming from the information of Joseph." Joseph being a just man, it is "only natural to suppose" that he would have left behind him some testimony to clear the matter up. "This document, he must, we should suppose, have given to Mary," to vindicate, "when occasion demanded," her own virginity.

"Why should she not have given it to the family of Joseph, the now believing brethren of the Lord?¹ Why should it not have

¹ Is there any evidence that our Lord's brethren (with the exception of James after the Resurrection) ever believed in His divinity?

passed from their hands to the evangelist of the First Gospel, and have been worked over by him in view of his predominant interest—that of calling attention to fulfilment of prophecies? This theory of the origin of the first two chapters of St. Matthew's Gospel at once accounts for the phenomena they present and vindicates, in substance, their historical character."

There is more special pleading of this kind, which some may think a melancholy example of the way in which ecclesiastical theories may be built up and sustained. The incompatibility of the two genealogies in Matthew and Luke only proves their independence; the point is hardly worth discussing. To go on answering objections made to the historical trustworthiness of documents "is apt to give an impression of weakness." The infancy documents bear "unmistakable traces" of coming ultimately from Joseph and Mary: for Dr. Gore, though he does not set out or explain these traces, that assertion is enough. He passes on confidently to his conclusion: "in all essential features we are justified in taking these narratives for real history." He has convinced himself, if not his readers, that the evidence for the Virgin Birth is "strong and cogent." But to clinch it he admits that there is needed the sense that, Jesus being what He was, "His human birth could hardly have been otherwise than is implied in the virginity of His mother." Historical evidence is clearly superfluous if one starts with an unshakeable conviction that circumstances, however contradictory of human experience, cannot be otherwise than what one believes and wishes them to be.

But the Bishop's treatise has one further argument, which may possibly have weighed with him more than all the rest. To admit that the historical position of this dogma is doubtful would be "to strike a mortal blow at the authority of the Christian Church." Have we perhaps in the Church of England, as in the Church of Rome, sincere and ardent clergy in whose view it is really more important to prop up ecclesiastical authority and ecclesiastical tradition than to pursue fearlessly the search for truth? Divine providence, Dr. Gore claims, has always guarded the Catholic Church, in the production of its formulas, from asserting "anything which can reasonably be

called unwarranted or superstitious." There is therefore a just presumption against surrendering any single article of the original Creeds. And if any phrase or thought in our Creeds appears to us imperfect, we may hereafter see that our earthly faculties "lagged in their clumsiness behind the perfect apprehension" of the truths which the Creeds indisputably represent. The truth, when seen clearly, "will never belie but will infinitely transcend" the statements made there. In the meantime the Creeds may be regarded as "the most perfectly balanced and harmonious expression of the truth whereof our earthly knowledge is, or will be, capable." And on the question of evidence people who are not trained theologians must be reminded that the intelligence required to apprehend and give judgment on religious subject matter "is in some respects other, and more, than that intelligence which can deal with evidence into which no element of spiritual consciousness enters!"

It is difficult to comment on arguments of this nature with the respect which all men owe to the memory of Bishop Gore; for Dr. Gore, with all his democratic sympathies, never realized any more than Dr. Newman how deeply ingrained in the great majority of Englishmen is distrust of ecclesiastical assumptions of this kind. It will hardly be possible to revive religion in this country if a tenacious obscurantist spirit is allowed to govern the decisions of the Church. The worst danger to religion is a closed mind. Men trying to understand the deepest problems of life and death and immortality cannot in the twentieth century be expected to regard as beyond the reach of question formulas adopted by fallible Greek theologians in the fifth. They will not allow that Christian thought has been incapable of progress since the year 451. The newer generations growing up will not be persuaded to accept that view. The congregations in hundreds of our parish churches refuse to accept it. Biblical scholars and students refuse to accept it. School teachers refuse to accept it. Professors of Divinity refuse to accept it. Even the Bishops are not as a whole quite sure that they can accept it any longer. While the spirit of ecclesiasticism clings still to "the idol of tradition," pays curious homage to

the shade of Becket, labours with Newman to magnify the office and the authority of the priest, the unrest in religion increases. The movement of the modern mind goes on. And this movement is not stopped or even impressed by the assertion that these dogmas must be infallible and faultless because they have been taught and believed in *semper, ubique, ab omnibus* since the organization of the Church began.

These considerations have carried us beyond the particular dogma of the Virgin Birth. But before leaving that two small points may be mentioned. First, in May 1918 an attempt was made in Convocation to compel every minister of the Church to accept and teach the doctrine; but it was decided on the advice of the Primate to take no action in the matter. Secondly the recent *Doctrinal Report* has acknowledged that a deep division of opinion on this subject exists within the Church, has admitted that the doctrine, though valued by many, is certainly not accepted by some of our clergy, and has recognized that "the work of scholars upon the New Testament has created a new setting of which theologians in their treatment of this article are obliged to take account."

There have been some curious sequels to the acceptance of the story of the Virgin Birth. One superstition tends to breed another, and round the Virgin Mary's fragmentary and uncertain history a wealth of hagiographical material has grown up. Confident theologians, having established to their own satisfaction the virginity of the Mother of Jesus, went on to proclaim her perpetual sinlessness: she must be acquitted of having ever borne a child in the natural way. Mary's perpetual virginity thus became an honoured doctrine, though Evangelists and early Fathers might not accept it, and though no one in authority seems to have taught it in the first three centuries of the Catholic Church. It appeared in the second century, and apocryphal legends were based upon it. But it had no official standing till Ambrose and Jerome began to take it up. Then the Council of Chalcedon in 451 thought fit to approve it, and the epithet *ἀεί παρθένος* made the doctrine binding on the orthodox for ever.

But that is not all. Mariolatry was growing, and Roman

theologians advanced a further step. The Virgin, it was discovered, was not only incapable of sin herself. She could never have been the cause of sin in others—sin and the processes of human generation being in this argument interchangeable terms. She must have been conceived sinlessly and spotless, though conspicuous theologians including Thomas Aquinas long declined to support the idea. The dogma that the Virgin Mary was “preserved from all stain of Original Sin,” was defined as “of faith” by Pius IX in 1854. And in the early days of the twentieth century the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin descended with authority on the modern world—fresh material for marvelling and worship, and possibly a fresh occasion for subscribing funds. In 1904, Dr. Inge reminds us, the Pope, who is infallible, declared that the Hebrew patriarchs had been familiar with the doctrine, and had found consolation in the thought of Mary in the solemn moments of their lives. Can one regard with becoming seriousness such *ex cathedra* utterances of the Roman Church? If religion is to be made a thing of myths and fancies, there is no limit to the curiosities which it may include. We may be allowed to hope that admirers of the Roman system will hesitate before introducing this method of multiplying dogmas into the English Church.

VII

The doctrine of the Descent into Hell. The legend that the Saviour left the Cross to rescue Adam and the Saints from Hell cannot be treated as a serious belief

Take another ancient and romantic doctrine—*He descended into Hell*. This also, and with even less warranty if possible, was incorporated by theologians in the dim ages in the Apostles' and the Athanasian Creeds. It is not always realized what the words mean. Some people think them merely a picturesque way of saying that Jesus died. But that view is of course a mistake. They are a deliberate affirmation of an artless legend which the Middle Ages loved, and which laid down that

Christ had descended from the Cross to visit Hell and to deliver Adam and the saints who waited there. The legends on the subject in the apocryphal books are, as myths, delightful in their simple piety and charm. In the *Gospel of Bartholomew* Bartholomew questions the Saviour thus:

“Lord, when thou wentest to be hanged upon the cross, I followed thee afar off and saw thee hung upon the cross, and the angels coming down from heaven and worshipping thee. And when there came darkness, I beheld, and I saw thee that thou wast vanished away from the cross, and I heard only a voice in the parts under the earth, and great wailing and gnashing of teeth on a sudden. Tell me, Lord, whither wentest thou from the cross?”

And the Saviour answers Bartholomew, His beloved, and narrates the whole story to him; how He descended step by step into the nether regions, and heard at last the voice of Hades, that is Hell personified, speaking with Beliar, the Devil, and saying, “As I perceive, a God cometh hither. . . . I hear the breathing of the Most High, and I cannot endure it.” The Devil bids Hades to be strong and not to submit. But as Christ draws nearer and nearer, and the angels summon the powers of Hell to remove their gates and admit the King of Glory, the pain and terror of Hades grow and the Devil’s exhortations fail to sustain him.

“Then,” adds the Saviour, “did I enter in and scourged him and bound him with chains which cannot be loosed, and brought forth thence all the patriarchs and came again unto the cross.”

In this account Adam appears as a man of very great stature, whom the angels bear up in their hands. When Jesus told him how He had hung upon the Cross for him and for his children’s sake, Adam groaned. But the angels ascended before him singing praises. Beliar too in this version is a formidable figure of some dimensions. His breadth was forty cubits and his length six hundred cubits, his face a lightning of fire and his nostrils full of smoke. He required 660 angels to hold him and fiery chains to bind him down. It was no wonder if Bartholomew

was afraid to draw near even at the Saviour's bidding, and to put his foot on the great dragon's neck. When muzzled and powerless, however, the Devil proved to be full of curious information, and quite ready to satisfy Bartholomew's inquisitiveness in regard to his powers and his career.

In another version, given in the *Gospel of Nicodemus* or *Acts of Pilate*, we get some other details. A sudden marvellous light appears to Adam and Abraham and the patriarchs and prophets sitting in the darkness, and the voice as it were of a dweller in the wilderness announces the coming of the Son of God. Satan—Beliar is now called Satan or Beelzebub—warns Hades or Hell of the enemy approaching. He is terrified when he hears the voice of the Son as the voice of a great thunder, and the angels demanding admission for Him. Hades in this version shows more courage. He bids Satan go forth and withstand the invader if he can, and he orders his wicked ministers to shut and bar the gates of Tartarus. David then uses some very strong language towards him, and Adam too defies the powers of darkness, and the saints rejoice. Still the angels summon Hades to surrender and to open the doors of Hell. The Saviour appears. The gates and bars are broken. The dead that were bound are unloosed from their chains. Hades cries out at last "we are overcome," and the King of Glory enters in. He lays hold of Satan and delivers him to the powers of evil, and draws Adam and the saints about Himself. Then, leaving His Cross in Hell as a sign of His victory, He hands over Adam to the archangel Michael, who brings up all the saints into Paradise at last.

There is nothing but innocent and imaginative piety in legends such as these, and so long as they are treated as fit subjects for pictures and romance the most exacting historian would not condemn them. But when the worshippers of tradition tell us that they have been for centuries parts of our Creeds, and warn us that no single article of these Creeds may be surrendered, how can they expect us to agree? The dogma of the Descent into Hell has, no doubt, like the dogma of the Virgin Birth, been believed and taught in the Church *semper, ubique, ab omnibus*. The authors of the *Doctrinal Report* do not,

the present writer understands, express any decided opinion as to whether it ought to be so believed and taught in future. But it would seem to invite misunderstanding to continue to affirm in our churches every week our belief in a picturesque fable adopted, it may be, about A.D. 400 from a local version of the Apostles' Creed

VIII

The deeper problems of the Resurrection. The *Doctrinal Report* on the elements of doubt. The few facts which we know with exactness; questions raised by M. Loisy, Professor Guignebert and Dr. Kirsopp Lake. The statements made in the New Testament on the burial and reappearance of our Lord, (1) by St. Paul, (2) by Mark, (3) by Matthew, (4) by Luke, (5) by John, and (6) in the Acts, on which the history of the Resurrection rests

Far deeper and graver problems are raised by the clauses in the Creeds which bear upon the Resurrection. On these the *Doctrinal Report* speaks with a frankness and a caution which both inspire respect. We may allow ourselves to ask whether the word evidence is not sometimes used too loosely about statements made in the New Testament, and whether the exultation of the disciples when the belief dawned on them that Jesus had risen from the dead can, though infinitely natural, be properly described as "direct evidence for the fact of the Resurrection." But, be that as it may, the Commission on Christian Doctrine does not feel bound to analyse or evaluate this evidence in detail. It admits the elements of doubt which enter in, and the difficulty of supplying a clear answer to the question "what was it exactly that happened?"

"Even if the full and undisputed records of eye-witnesses could be studied, there would still be room for difference in judgment, (a) As to how much was seen with the bodily eye, and how much with spiritual vision; (b) How much was objectively given, and how much was the contribution of subjective interpretation; (c) How much of what is admitted to be subjective interpretation may nevertheless be considered true."

We may, however, for our own satisfaction try to sum up the ascertainable facts, and on this point Professor Guignebert's notable study of Jesus, with its rigorous insistence on historical tests, has been of real service to knowledge. When we are gravely told that "for spiritual facts only spiritual evidence is ultimately decisive," it is a relief to find an ecclesiastical writer who does not flinch from weighing assertions of fact independently and coolly, as historians ought to and as lawyers for the most part do.

The whole story of the Saviour's Passion—stories of the Passion were naturally the first to multiply and spread—is to some extent veiled in uncertainty, apart from the solemn mystery surrounding it all. There are undeniable difficulties and contradictions in it, and some elements of legend, it may well be, intertwined. No student can wholly explain these matters, and it is not essential to our main beliefs that we should. We know that at some date which is still uncertain—the Church of the sixth century claimed to know more on that subject than the Church of the first—Jesus of Nazareth was arrested, tried, condemned and executed. Beyond that, accurately and absolutely, we know little more. Everything connected with the ending of His mortal life has "suffered transmutation into sacred history." Those who lean towards rationalism may affirm that supernatural incidents cannot be proved. Those who lean towards credulity may insist that the statements in the Gospels are true because they are there, that for the Son of God nothing was impossible, and that the Resurrection is its own infallible proof. M. Loisy's attitude has been thought by some to be too sceptical: yet there may be truth in his suggestion that if Pilate had kept Jesus in prison the Christian Church would never have been born. M. Loisy doubts if we can depend on the reports of the Trial. The whole story, he feels, has been dramatized and worked up. He questions the traditions about Judas and Barabbas, the stories of the two thieves, of the vinegar, of the parting of the garments, introduced perhaps to verify old prophecies, the portents of the darkness, the torn veil, the earthquake and the dead arising, which colour and heighten the tragedy so much. Yet the fact of

the Crucifixion cannot be doubted. Nor will it overload our consciences to think that some at least of these moving traditions may be true.

It is more difficult perhaps to deal with the doubts which Professor Guignebert has expressed. Can we accept without some historical misgivings John the Evangelist's story that Judas received a band, from the Roman authorities presumably, to arrest Jesus; or Luke's story of Pilate sending Jesus before Herod; or all the alleged proceedings of the chief priests and scribes and elders; or the account of the solemn hour in the garden at Gethsemane—who could have heard or reported the words of Jesus when left alone by His disciples there?—or the incidents which occurred, and the words which were spoken, at the Last Supper; who noted or preserved them, and on what authority do the details rest? All these points, and others also, suggest perplexities which no one has resolved. And even more difficult to answer is the question—is it not almost certain that the disciples fled from Jerusalem after the Crucifixion, overwhelmed with horror and despair? But if that be so, can it be true that they had expected the Resurrection, not only because of ancient predictions, but because Jesus had definitely warned them of the tragedy hanging over Him and of the glory and triumph which would follow?

Nor does greater certainty attend us when we try to review and arrange the incidents immediately after the Saviour's death. M. Guignebert's summary ought not to be lightly dismissed.

“Synoptic tradition believed that devout hands took the body of Jesus down from the cross and laid it in the tomb on the Friday evening; that Jesus came forth triumphantly on the Sunday morning, and that after an earthly sojourn, during which his disciples may have seen him several times, he ascended to heaven, and returned to God the Father who had sent him to men. By combining the different statements in the four Gospels, the Acts, Paul's Epistles and the first Epistle of Peter, the Christian creed has constructed an account of these events that seems at first sight fairly consistent. But this impression disappears before the most superficial examination of

the texts, and reveals instead a mosaic artificially composed of contradictory fragments, which have only been combined in disregard of their discrepancies by exhibiting as a sequence what are really alternative narratives."

The problem is complicated, he reminds us, because the Burial, Resurrection and Ascension cannot be separated, and because the sources are confused and difficult to handle. Doubts have gathered over the familiar story of the Burial. Can we be certain where the body of our Lord was put? The site of the tomb seems to have been lost during the first three centuries of the Christian era: it is said to have been discovered again, by inspiration, in the reign of Constantine. Jerusalem, it must be remembered, was captured and destroyed after the Saviour's death. It has been doubted whether Jesus actually died upon the Cross. It was unusual in that cruel form of execution for death to come so quickly. Pilate, we are told, "marvelled if he were already dead," and Origen thought the rapidity of His death a miracle. What first convinced the Apostles of the Resurrection was not the story of the empty tomb but the visions of Jesus afterwards, and especially the experience of Peter. The stories related of the tomb may have been only a secondary narrative which did not take shape till later.

The fact is that all the reports we have of the Burial, the Tomb and the Appearances of Jesus are as difficult to see in true perspective as they are dear to minds trained and eager to accept them. They do not all agree in their details. It may be startling to find M. Loisy condemning as fictions narratives so stamped upon our minds and hearts. But we must allow that the evidence of their authenticity is frail. Careful studies of them have in recent years been made, and the results are very carefully considered in Dr. Kirsopp Lake's book *The Historical Evidence for the Resurrection*. We may summarize some points in them here.

First we have St. Paul's statement, the earliest in date, if we may take the passage in the fifteenth chapter of the First Epistle to the Corinthians as his. It records, in a few lines only, the burial, the rising again on the third day "according to the scriptures," and the appearances, first to Cephas, then to the Twelve, and after that to some five hundred brethren at once,

to James, to all the Apostles, and last of all to Paul himself. There is no mention of the empty tomb.

Then we have the accounts in the four canonical Gospels, which do not begin till some forty years after the Crucifixion, and Mark, as usual, takes the lead. He relates the burial by Joseph of Arimathaea, "an honourable counsellor," in a sepulchre hewn out of a rock, and the rolling of a stone against the door: the visit to the sepulchre at sunrise "when the sabbath was past" of Mary Magdalene with Mary the mother of James, and Salome, who brought sweet spices to anoint the body: their finding the great stone rolled away, and a young man sitting in the sepulchre, clothed in a long white garment, who told them that Jesus was risen, and bade them go and tell His disciples that He was going before them into Galilee where they would see Him. They were amazed and fled from the sepulchre: "neither said they anything to any man; for they were afraid." Here Mark's Gospel in its original form ends. The verses which follow are admittedly added by a later hand. As the text stands we have a short record of the appearances of Jesus: first to Mary Magdalene, "out of whom he had cast seven devils," who "went and told them that had been with him," but they disbelieved her story: then His appearance in another form "unto two of them as they walked, and went into the country"; these two told it to "the residue," and were not believed: and then His appearance to the eleven as they sat at meat, whom He upbraided for their unbelief, and whom He bade go into all the world "and preach the gospel to every creature."

"So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God."

The end of this account is obviously open to question. There have been many conjectures, none verifiable, as to what the "Lost Conclusion" of Mark's Gospel contained.

Matthew's narrative, substantially like Mark's, has some substantial differences also. We have the burial by Joseph of Arimathaea in his own new tomb, and the great stone rolled to the door; "Mary Magdalene and the other Mary sitting over against the sepulchre" apparently watched the proceedings.

Next day, at the request of the chief priests and Pharisees, Pilate agreed to the setting of a watch on the tomb and the sealing of the stone. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the sepulchre toward the dawn of the first day of the week.

“And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled the stone from the door, and sat upon it.”

The angel's countenance was like lightning and his raiment white as snow, and for fear of him the keepers shook and became as dead men. The narrative has grown in picturesque details. The angel bade the women fear not, for Jesus which was crucified had risen, and was going before them into Galilee where they should see Him. The women ran immediately to tell the disciples, and on the way Jesus met them, and they held Him by the feet and worshipped Him.

“Go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me.”

A few verses interposed here state that the watch reported to the chief priests what had happened, and were bribed by the chief priests and elders to say that the disciples had stolen Jesus away by night while the soldiers slept. And then we are briefly told that the eleven disciples “went away into Galilee, into a mountain, where Jesus had appointed them”; that they saw Jesus and worshipped Him, “but some doubted”; and that He bade them go forth and teach all nations. There is nothing about any other appearances. And there is no specific statement about the Ascension.

Luke, as so often, enlarges and embroiders on the simpler tales. He has the same story of the burial by Joseph of Arimathea; the women who had come with Jesus from Galilee followed after, “and beheld the sepulchre, and how his body was laid.” On the first day of the week, very early, they came to the sepulchre with spices and ointments—they included Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and other women; they found the stone rolled away and entered in, but could not find the body of Jesus; and in their perplexity two men in shining garments appeared, who told

them that Jesus was risen, and reminded them how He had spoken to them, "when he was yet in Galilee," of His approaching Crucifixion and Resurrection. And they returned from the sepulchre "and told all these things unto the eleven, and to all the rest," who treated them as idle tales. But Peter arose and ran to the sepulchre, and found the linen clothes in the empty tomb. (This statement critics of authority have condemned as an interpolation.) That same day "two of them," walking to Emmaus, were joined by Jesus, but "their eyes were holden that they should not know him." He questioned them about their sadness and their talk; and one of the two, Cleopas, expressed surprise that He should know nothing of what had been passing in Jerusalem, and told Him of the death of Jesus, and of the vision which certain women of their company had had that day at the empty tomb.

"Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken."

Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?

And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself."

When they drew nigh to the village, they constrained Him to stay with them. And sitting at meat with them, He took bread and blessed it and brake and gave to them. And their eyes were opened and they knew Him; and He vanished out of their sight.

It is a charming story. "Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way?" The two walkers returned the same hour to Jerusalem, found the eleven gathered together, and told them about it. And while they spoke Jesus Himself stood in the midst of them, and blessed them and revealed Himself.

"Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me and see: for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have."

While they believed not for joy, He asked for meat; and they gave Him "a piece of a broiled fish, and of an honeycomb"; and He took it and did eat before them. And He opened their

understanding and spoke to them of the scriptures, how it behoved Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead.

“Behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you : but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high.”

Then He led them out to Bethany, and lifted up His hands and blessed them.

“And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven.”

(This verse is also suspected of being an interpolation.) There is beauty in the story ; but there are substantial difficulties too. The differences between this narrative and Matthew’s and Mark’s are unmistakeable. The disappearance of the solemn exhortation to the disciples to go into Galilee to meet and see the risen Lord is not easy to explain. Even more curious is the Saviour’s appeal to them to realize that He was no spirit but flesh and bones. Again one is almost tempted to ask is it conceivable that He had not actually died upon the Cross, that His emergence from the grave was natural, that, though broken and dying, He was still at the time of this appearance alive?

The Fourth Gospel also gives in substance the same story, but with variations and with more illustrative details. There too we have the burial by Joseph of Arimathaca, and the visit of Mary Magdalene to the tomb when it was yet dark on the first day of the week. But in this version Mary comes by herself, and finding the tomb open runs to tell Peter and John, the beloved disciple, that the Lord has been taken away. Peter and John then run to the sepulchre and find it empty, and the linen clothes lying there, and also “in a place by itself” the napkin that had been about His head. Then the two disciples go home, but Mary stands by the sepulchre weeping. And as she wept she stooped down and looked in and saw two angels in white, sitting one at the head and the other at the feet where the body of Jesus had lain. They ask her why she weeps, and she answers “Because they have taken away my Lord.” And turning she sees Jesus standing, and knows not that it is He. He too asks her why she weeps, and she, “supposing Him to be

the gardener," entreats Him: "Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou has laid him."

"Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master.

Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God and your God."

Mary Magdalene then comes and tells the disciples of her meeting with Jesus and her talk with Him. The story grows in interest and details.

That same day at evening Jesus appears where the disciples were assembled together behind shut doors. He greets them, shows them His hands and His side, and breathes on them and says "Receive ye the Holy Ghost." Eight days later, Thomas Didymus, who had not been at this meeting and still doubted the Lord's reappearance, is convinced in another gathering of the disciples, also held behind shut doors: "Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side." After these things, we are told in the last chapter of John's Gospel, Jesus shows Himself again to the disciples at the sea of Tiberias, and there is another marvellous load of fishes, and the Saviour invites His disciples to come and dine with Him. And here occur the reiterated questions to Peter—"Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?"—and the thrice repeated order "Feed my lambs," or "feed my sheep." Verses follow which are supposed to indicate the destinies awaiting both Peter and John. But the wording is mysterious. Of the Ascension nothing is said. And the whole of this chapter is now generally admitted to be an addition to the Gospel by a later hand.

The Acts, which Dr. Kirsopp Lake regards as possibly a composite work in two main divisions, tell us nothing of the burial of Jesus or of the empty tomb. They open with the puzzling statement, strangely different from anything which Luke related in his Gospel, that the Saviour showed Himself alive after His Passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of the Apostles forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining

to the kingdom of God. He bade them not depart from Jerusalem—there is here again no question of His meeting them in Galilee—till they had been “baptized with the Holy Ghost.” When they asked Him, “Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?”, He answered that it was not for them to know the times or seasons in the Father’s power, and promised that they should, after the Holy Ghost had come upon them, be witnesses unto Him not in Jerusalem only but unto the uttermost part of the earth.

“When he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight.”

They, after a brief vision of two men in white apparel standing by them, returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet.

IX

Difficulties presented by these statements. The records of the Ascension slight and disappointing. Perplexities overhanging the whole story. Could the Appearances have been hallucinations? Was it a phantom or a human form which appeared? What do we mean by the resurrection of the body? Did St. Paul believe in it? Are our Creeds agreed about it? Can we avoid these questions by declaring that our faith is a mystery settled for us by the Apostles and by the Fathers and organizers of the Church?

The references in the four Gospels, the Acts and the Epistles, of which those quoted here are the chief, are the foundations on which the history of the Resurrection rests. In unauthorized and apocryphal writings there is much more material gathered round the subject. Dr. Kirsopp Lake has drawn attention to the account given in the apocryphal *Gospel of Peter* of the Trial Crucifixion, Burial and Resurrection of our Lord. There the Ascension is represented as taking place at the moment of His death upon the Cross, and the disciples as hiding in Jerusalem until the sabbath, when Peter, Andrew and Levi the son of Alphaeus returned to Galilee. There is no suggestion that they saw the risen Lord in or near Jerusalem. The account here of the empty tomb, with its shining figures and the Roman soldiers

watching, recalls in some points the story told by Matthew; in other points—in the appearance of men of vast stature and in the reference to Christ preaching “unto them that sleep”—it recalls the legend of the Descent into Hell. But the apocryphal books add nothing of value to the evidence which the passages of Scripture contain.

It will be allowed that there is a good deal in these passages to perplex enquirers. There is little agreement as to the number or the scene of the Appearances. Paul’s account in the Corinthians does not tally with the others. And there is little agreement about the Ascension. The scanty, fragmentary, conflicting statements do not make a convincing record. A very early tradition placed the Ascension on the same day as the Resurrection. The Acts postpone it for some forty days. Mark’s slight and inadequate reference to it is clearly a later addition. Matthew and John have nothing to say on the subject. Luke’s account is strangely brief when compared with the account in the beginning of the Acts, which tradition also attributes to him. Considering that the Ascension is the crowning marvel of a marvellous story, it is surprising that the incident should be dismissed so quickly, and that so little stress should be laid upon it. The uncertainties which hang over the whole narrative are not easily dispelled. Must not the narrators, we ask ourselves, have felt a little uncertain about the actual facts?

It is also remarkable that we hear so little of the early appearance to Peter, which first of all, it seems, gave rise to the belief in the Resurrection. Could there have been some early appearances in Galilee—whither, one is led to imagine, the disciples or some of them fled after the Crucifixion—and other appearances in Jerusalem later? We cannot say. Disturbing questions never answered gather round the few statements we possess; but they are questions of supreme importance to the structure of belief built on them. Dr. Harnack has suggested that the stories of the empty tomb may have complicated and confused the traditions about the appearances to the disciples. But once again we have to confess that nothing is certain. We do not really know. The *Doctrinal Report*, it is noteworthy, tells us that some members of the Commission incline to the belief “that the connexion made in the New Testament

between the emptiness of a tomb and the appearances of the Risen Lord belongs rather to the sphere of religious symbolism than to that of historical fact."

How far such appearances, or alleged appearances honestly believed in, can be explained by rapt hallucination it is of course difficult to say. But among religious enthusiasts such visions have all through the ages been frequently seen and readily believed. The world in the first centuries of the Christian era was by no means immune against hallucinations of this kind. It was a world which believed in spirits good and bad, and which did not distinguish between subjective and objective experiences so readily as we may do to-day. The idea that prophets like Elijah and Isaiah should have been rapt into heaven was to the Jews by no means incredible. And we have no first-hand record of what the disciples thought or felt about it. Peter, so far as we can judge, would not have been insensitive to such ideas. The tale of the empty tomb in the Fourth Gospel rests chiefly on the evidence of Mary Magdalene, and Celsus, a keen Roman critic of the second century, scorned it as the testimony of a neurotic woman. We are certainly not bound by the opinions of Celsus; but in weighing the value of evidence we cannot altogether ignore considerations of that type.

No less difficult is the question, of what nature could these experiences have been? Did the disciples, if they saw their Master after death, see a spiritual form, an unworldly apparition, or, to use the words which Luke attributed to Jesus, a human figure of flesh and bones? An idea grew up that there might have been two kinds of apparitions, a body of flesh and blood before the Ascension and an immaterial body afterwards. But all such theories are pure conjecture. On this problem again there hangs the further question, what do we mean when we assert so often that we believe in the resurrection of the body? What warrant have we for doing this? St. Paul, it seems, believed in nothing of the kind. The words in the fifteenth chapter of the First Epistle to the Corinthians, if we accept them as his, are beyond misunderstanding: "flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God." How are the dead raised up, he asks, and "with what body do they come?"

The answer is given in that splendid passage which the death of our loved ones has made familiar to us all.

“So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption:

It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power:

It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.”

St. Paul spoke of a mystery. “We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed.” What kind of change he contemplated or expected who can say? Many Jews, the *Doctrinal Report* reminds us, had long held the belief that the dead would rise again with their bodies at the last day. Our Creeds in the original texts differed. The Apostles’ Creed used the Latin phrase *resurrectio carnis*, the resurrection of the flesh. The Nicene Creed used the Greek phrase *ἀνάστασις νεκρῶν*, which might mean either the bodily or the spiritual resurrection of the dead. Some change of substance may have been in the Apostle’s mind. His language is not always clear. But can we, in defiance of his noble rhetoric, where for a moment a prophet seems to speak, go on asserting our belief in the resurrection of the body, a phrase to which no definite meaning seems to be attached? Is it a theory to be confidently adopted by Christians as an assured part of the future of mankind?

It is easy, of course, and it should not be thought unreasonable, in men seeking from the Church an answer to the problems which she sets, to raise these troubling questions. But it is far from easy to reply. And it cannot be done perhaps without breaking through, more frankly and courageously than has yet been officially attempted, the reserve in which many churchmen would like to keep enfolded some ancient and mysterious traditions of the Church. A refusal to answer, no doubt, baffles the questioners; but can it to be wholly satisfactory to those who decline to reply? It is not sufficient nowadays to tell people that faith is a mystery, and that they must believe before they can understand. Indeed it is the conviction that this attitude will never prove adequate or final, which has led Professor Guignebert through his patient examination of what can or

cannot be considered evidence of sacred facts. The Christology which developed in the early ages, in passionate glorification of the risen Christ, established—we are more and more compelled to allow the more we study it—something very different from the religion which had filled the life and being of Jesus Himself. The Gospel moulded in the years after His mortal tragedy was in spirit and purpose widely different from the Gospel He had taught. His Apostles founded a new faith on the Resurrection, and their surpassing courage and devotion led it amazingly to the conquest of the world. But even now, after nineteen centuries of faith and thought and speculation, we find an honest and able historian, a skilful and whole-hearted searcher after truth, ending his long enquiry with the grave and searching question whether “the dogma of the Resurrection, which has so long been the mainstay of Christianity, has not, in our day, become too heavy a burden for it to bear.”

Side by side with this reflexion from a Professor of Christian Literature in the Sorbonne we may perhaps place the warning given us by another distinguished teacher of theology, who has worked with students in Europe and America, Dr. Kirsopp Lake.

“I would protest that it is courting intellectual disaster for us Christians to base the claims of our religion to attention from this generation, which is hesitating whether it will hear or whether it will forbear, on any purely theological argument or on the accuracy of the narratives of any event in the past. Those who teach theology know best how little effect theology, and how great effect religion, has on the modern man.”

Can theology ever be more than a treasure-house of venerable theories called into existence to account for religion—theories which it elaborates and enriches with its learning, illumines with its hopes, transfigures with its mysteries, but may find itself in the end unable to explain? Dare we rest in the belief that, if theology fails us, there are yet spiritual promptings in the hearts of men,

“Of truth and grandeur, beauty, love and hope,
And melancholy fear subdued by faith,”

which, if we follow them, may lead us back to God from whom they come?

CHAPTER V

THE INEVITABLE ISSUE

I

Should religious education aim at defending dogma or at inculcating conduct? The need of evidence to prove the truth of dogmas; Professor Henry Sidgwick's view

It is not long since the Headmaster of a well-known Public School submitted a plea, almost a demand, for more dogma in the teaching of boys. Dogma appeared to him to be the element most needed in teaching if religion in this country were to be maintained. Yet it would be a melancholy thing if schoolmasters set themselves to teach the younger generation that religious education consists not in thinking but simply in believing what they are told. There are those—their number must be steadily increasing—to whom it seems that the numbing influence of ancient dogmas has contributed more than anything else to the decay of religion in English life, and that, unless we can escape from that obsession, no religion worth the name will long survive. For those who take the latter view Christianity consists not in dogma but in conduct. Dogmas may prove to be precarious speculations: conduct is the daily practice of the highest rules we know.

There will always probably be these two schools of thought. But the dogmatists, who have a powerful hold on minds submitted to habit and convention, suffer from one disadvantage nowadays, that they are required to prove their case. It can no longer be taken for granted that immemorial traditions, accepted *semper, ubique, ab omnibus* in the ecclesiastical world, are beyond the possibility of error. Tags of Latin, however confidently repeated, are but a weak foundation for faith. The new learning asks that every doctrine of supreme importance should be examined afresh, and should not, unless it can be proved to demonstration, be proclaimed in public worship as an eternal truth. And proof is often a very difficult thing. The

late Professor Henry Sidgwick, for long a notable figure at Cambridge, a deep and earnest student of religion, with a fine and scrupulous honesty of mind, came to the conclusion that no religion which depended on the correctness of historical statements about mysterious events in a foreign country and a remote period could reach the evidential standard he required. And if evidence in the ordinary sense failed, he was not prepared to accept in its place the authority of traditions or of early Fathers or even of the Bishops of the Church. "Bishops individually," he is reported to have said, "represent everything that I find most agreeable; collectively everything that I most detest." Yet Dr. Gore, who was three times a Bishop and a firm believer in theological traditions, found few men who recalled to him more clearly the saying "Blessed are the pure in heart."

Such men, if they part company from doubtful dogma, find in this no reason for dismay. They cling steadfastly to their inextinguishable hope of some purpose, supreme, inscrutable, benevolent, guiding the world through its tangled destinies, though the guidance may often be difficult to trace. They keep their reverent faith in goodness, their deep concern for spiritual things. And whatever may happen to doctrinal speculations the essence of the Christianity they love survives.

II

The obligation on our ecclesiastical leaders to encourage study and enquiry. The need of realizing that some ancient formulas cannot in the light of modern knowledge be maintained

We may regret, but it is not unnatural, that the struggle to readjust our opinions in matters of such moment appears to some good church-people an unpardonable thing. Open-mindedness on vital points of doctrine is still regarded in many quarters as desertion, and it says much for the charity and wisdom of the recent Commission that they should recognize the need for it as frankly as they do. They admit the fundamental problem which churchmen have to solve. They recognize "that there is in the whole orthodox Christian position a

great difficulty in reconciling belief in the eternity of God the Son 'who was made man' with the equally essential conviction, based on the Gospel narratives, of the truly human life of the Incarnate Christ." They acknowledge that it is the duty of the Church to go on seeking a way to solve this intellectual difficulty. But failure to solve it is, they urge, no reason for withholding the worship which Christians have always given to their Lord. In the development of the traditional Christology discipleship and worship preceded systematic speculation as to the relation of the Divine to the Human in the Person of Jesus Christ.

Is it not to the spirit of discipleship, to what Jesus taught His followers, that we all need to return? Is it not from the unnatural superstructure built upon it, described in the *Doctrinal Report* as "systematic speculation," but including baffling combinations of theology and metaphysics, elements of miracle, elements of legend, elements of ancient and perplexing cults, that we are groping our way, not quite unhopefully, towards a larger freedom now?

It is from those in authority, who have moved so far to invite discussion, that the invitation to approach the problems which baffle us must come. No ecclesiastical leader has done more than the present Primate to plead for life and liberty in matters of religion—many and different as are, no doubt, the interpretations put upon those terms. There never was a moment in our history when life and liberty meant more to us than now. The Archbishop may be assured of deep and loyal gratitude in anything that he can do to pour new life into the religion of our people and to instil new liberty into the teaching they receive.

It would be a great step forward if the clergy and their congregations could as a whole be made to realize that the Church officially welcomes every proved advance in scholarship and learning which enlarges our knowledge of Christian documents and Christian history, even though it may at first disturb received ideas. Nothing would so soon dispel the alleged indifference of our people to religion as the awakening of our clergy to the fact that they are facing a revolution in conventional and traditional thought, and that this new learning is

not a thing to shun or fear, but a thing to examine and criticize and test and understand, a part of the difficult problem we are all pursuing, an essential element in the quest for truth.

It would be a further step forward if the Heads of the Church would make it plain that consideration will be given to any strongly-supported plea for an official statement acknowledging that certain formulas now used in our services are archaic and unacceptable to many, that some of them would be better dispensed with altogether, and that on others much liberty of interpretation ought to be allowed.

For it is the impossibility of continuing to affirm our blind belief in theories and assertions which we must admit to be largely founded in error, that is the main cause of the unrest in religion and the main obstacle to its revival to-day. We cannot fight shy of facing this issue any longer. We must, if we are honest, decide for ourselves which of the old, inherited dogmas we can in the light of modern knowledge accept, and which we must, not without reverence and affection, relegate to the dim borderland where legend, piety and speculation meet. That done, the way is opened to a wider understanding and a deeper faith.

III

Should not secondary activities in the Church of England, problems of organization, of ritual, of re-union, give way to the need of re-examining some conventional beliefs? May the solution of our problems lie in returning to the spirit and purpose of our Master, and in building up afresh from those foundations "a Christian theology," in the words of the *Doctrinal Report*, "more adequate than any that has preceded it"?

If this vital issue could be settled, the secondary and minor issues which now occupy so much ecclesiastical attention would fall into their proper place. At any rate they would not absorb so many activities better devoted to more important things. There is plenty of energetic and capable churchmanship to be seen—schemes for new churches, which may often be needed, though it would seem desirable to fill those which are growing empty first; schemes for new cathedrals, which it is more

difficult to justify in days of national impoverishment where funds for more essential objects are required; and other schemes also which indicate a determination to maintain the pomp and authority of a great institution. Nor is pomp in the right setting a thing which needs defence. Dignified and fitting ritual in a place of dignity and beauty will always justify itself. But undue insistence on externals, like excessive punctiliousness in matters of costume, a weakness which the clerical shares with the military profession, does not stimulate religion, when it is felt that the ideas and thoughts behind these externals do not receive the same attention. A passion for vestments in a country parish sometimes excites more irony in humble quarters than a well-meaning parson understands. On all such points and all such subsidiary activities it is well to bear in mind a modern Bishop's warning:¹

"There is a great danger to-day in the exaltation of religious devotion and activity over love of the truth."

During the last sixty years, Dr. Talbot estimated, much of the best and most intense achievement, whether Evangelical or Catholic, has been "reared on a basis of reactionary thought."

Reunion, again—a large phrase now much in circulation among church-people whose minds rise above insular details—is a matter of which we are hearing a good deal. And it is not only a large phrase, but if properly interpreted a large ideal. Only so much depends on what it means and on the motives which cause it to be advocated so freely. Every plea for a closer understanding between the scattered branches of the Church of Christ must be listened to with respect. Every gesture towards fellowship and brotherhood with other Christians, at a moment when all are threatened by the powers of evil as never perhaps in modern times before, must seem to be worth making. But it still remains a question of importance—with whom and with what objects are we to re-unite?

The first and most urgent call of this nature is obviously for reunion among ourselves. Till the members of the Church of England are agreed with each other about their vital doctrines,

¹ See the quotation from Dr. N. Talbot, Bishop of Pretoria, given in Dr. Rashdall's *Jesus Human and Divine* (90-91).

it would seem premature to discuss points of similarity or difference between our Church and other Churches widely divided from our own. The next obvious call is for some closer understanding between those English and Scottish Churches which draw their ideals from the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century, if the abhorred term Protestant may be allowed. There is a real demand for closer unity between the Established and the Nonconformist Churches in this island, and a strong lead from our ecclesiastical rulers in that direction might do a great deal towards bringing it about. To achieve that without offence to Anglo-Catholic opinion would not only be a proof of statesmanship, but a long step towards agreement on the larger Christian interests of mankind.

But at the same time it must be admitted that reunion on points of real importance with the great Continental Churches of the East or West, whose history and tenets differ so largely from our own, is hardly to be expected. Anything more than a very friendly gesture is perhaps not to be desired. We must if we are candid recognize that reunion with the Roman Church is out of the question, and will not be considered at the Vatican except on terms involving our wholesale submission to the authority and infallibility of Rome. This has been made explicitly clear. Sympathy, charity, personal kindliness, toleration for differences in no way vital, and a keen, archaic interest in a venerable history shared for many centuries with ourselves, may well be a foundation for friendship with members of the Roman Catholic communion and members of the orthodox Churches in Eastern Europe. But it should be remembered that Loyola's precept "the mind must be subject to the Church" still dominates most unreformed religions. The territory ruled by Loyola's spiritual descendants is still, from the point of view of independent thought, a territory

"Where brooding Darkness spreads his jealous wings."

And to suppose that we could give fresh life to English or Scottish religion by associating it more closely with the obscurantist traditions which linger in the Churches of the Balkans and of Italy and Spain, is surely to indulge in illusions which might lead us woefully astray.

But these are minor issues, on which there is no need to dwell. All such questions would settle themselves naturally once a definite advance towards a more liberal theology were made, once we agreed that some conventional opinions ought to be surrendered, and that mistaken ecclesiastical traditions, however long accepted, must no longer hide the true figure of Jesus from our view. It may not be an easy task always to distinguish between the original Gospel, clothed in the language of Jesus, and the official Gospel of the end of the second century, shaped and modified, revised and sanctioned under the authority of the early Church. But the quest for truth and the revival of religion depend upon the skill and judgment which we bring to bear upon this problem, on the welcome which we give to the new learning, and on our resolve to relieve our services and formulas from some of the errors and perversions into which the older learning fell.

"There is reason to think," the *Doctrinal Report* reminds us, "that in some cases the words attributed to our Lord reflect rather the experience of the primitive Church, or the utterances of Christian prophets, than the actual words of Jesus."

Yet it is to the actual words of Jesus that we must endeavour to get back. The thing of moment for mankind is the Imitation of Jesus. His Incarnation is a mystery for theologians to explain.

It is important, the Report adds, that Scriptural phrases familiar to us should not be too readily discarded, for "traditional phrases lay less stringent fetters in practice upon the free play of thought than any constructed to express the mind of the moment." If changes in our theology come to be made it is certain that this warning will be borne in mind. Points of that kind would probably cause little difficulty once the Church set herself, as the Report suggests to us, to fashion at last, slowly, laboriously, reverently, "a Christian theology more adequate than any that has preceded it." She would quickly find absorbing interest in that magnificent, engrossing task.

To recover in all its purity and depth the spirit and purpose of Jesus, untarnished by the embellishments or fancies of His worshippers, by complicated superstitions or ignoble cults,

would be the loftiest labour that men could undertake. "What doth the Lord require of thee," asked the old prophet, "but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" Might not that simple creed suffice to answer many questionings, to bring comfort in dark hours to souls in travail, even to forge for some a link between the mortal world we know and the unknown divine?

THE END